

PREACHING FIRST PERSON NARRATIVE SERMONS TO
UNCHURCHED OR MARGINALIZED FEMALES

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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MAY 2012

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To David – My Father, First Teacher and Friend

To Virginia – My Mother, My Angel, and Friend

To Humphrey – My Husband, My Encourager and Friend

To Takia and Chanda – My Daughters, My Groundings and Friends

To Taimir – My Grandson, My Super Hero and Friend

To the Entire Village – My Support and Friends

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations.....	v
Preface.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	viii
Abstract.....	ix
Chapter I: Problems of First Person Narrative Preaching to Females.....	1
Chapter II: Biblically Speaking of First Person Narratives for Females.....	22
Chapter III: Theologians Speak of First Person Narratives for Females.....	49
Chapter IV: Methodology of the First Person Narrative Sermons.....	74
Chapter V: Evaluation and Assessment of the First Person Narratives.....	98
Appendix A: Sermons For Luke 10:38-42.....	126
Appendix B: The Book of Esther 1, 2 and 4 Children's Sermon.....	128
Appendix C: The Book of Ruth Chapters 1-4 Sermon.....	130
Appendix D: The Book of John 4:4-30 & 39-42 Sermon.....	132
Appendix E: Initial Questionnaire for the Mary and Martha Sermon.....	135
Appendix F: Final Questionnaire for the Additional Sermons.....	136
Bibliography.....	137
Vita.....	141

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Demographics of the Jesus Mission Church Sermon.....	87
2. Demographics of the Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center Sermon.....	88
3. Demographics of Greater Light Temple of Christ Church Children's Sermon...	90
4. Demographics of the Boston Home Sermon.....	93
5. Demographics of the Greater Light Temple of Christ Church Rap Sermon.....	95
6. Demographics of the New Life International Christian Center Sermon.....	96

PREFACE

Mission Impossible?

I once heard a great preacher preach what I contend is a monumental sermon. The title is one, which I as an African American female can relate. That sermon speaks of a Sunday dinner. As I embarked on preparing this thesis, I thought about the title and that message. African American females are familiar with the Sunday dinner, the fried chicken dinner, and the fried chicken after church. One of my favorite children's books by Patricia Polacco is entitled "Chicken Sunday." It tells the story of friends gathering for Sunday and holiday dinners.

I want preachers to be inspired to feed the people especially the females in the congregation. I want the readers of this thesis to be inspired by Jesus' words to Martha found in Luke 10:41 and 42, at that version of a chicken dinner. Let us help the mothers, sisters, aunts and daughters of the church and the streets to get out of the kitchen, out of the frying pan, out of the fire and out of the house sometimes. Tell them you do not have to be just a chicken; you can be an eagle. You are meant to soar above the chicken coop.

Now fly!

As many other women like Martha in the Bible and especially African American women in my generation, I love to cook. I love to create dishes, feed others, entertain them and prepare for a meal. However preaching is my passion and my mission is to go out and feed the hungry sheep. At this juncture in my life I have chosen to accept that mission. So upon sitting at Jesus' feet, I will. I will also listen to his every word. I will go out and do more than just cook a meal for physical sustenance.

As preachers, you are not chickens to peck in the dirt and speak unintelligible. You are not a turkey to be dressed up with no place to go. You do not want people to dine upon your words, feel bloated and wish they could have had a V8. No, you should want them to feast upon the cornucopia that Jesus' Word inspires in you and that you serve up. You should want Jesus to use you to exemplify through your preaching that you have chosen what is better and it will not be taken from you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my deepest thanks and love to my husband Humphrey Myers for all of his encouragement and support. He has been there through it all. When I said, "I cannot", he said, "You can and you must".

I also want to thank my parents who were there for me all of my life. I believe my mother is looking down on me right now from heaven and quoting the title of what she told me was one of her favorite songs, "Taking Care of Business". My grandmother too is home with the Lord. She was one of my first and favorite narrative storytellers. If it had not been for her living with us and telling me what was right, I could not have come as far as I have come. My godmother, all of my aunts, uncles, cousins, other relatives and the total village have touched my life and helped the dream of a twelve-year-old come true.

I need to give props to my daughters and my nine-year-old grandson whom I pray will continue to soar like eagles and know that I love them unconditionally. The friends and angels that God placed in my life who were there for me throughout this challenging, but awesome journey are too numerable to call by name. However, I do have to personally thank my friend Gail, whom I met my first day at a new school in the sixth grade upon moving to a new neighborhood. After that we became inseparable and pretty much still are, praise God. I also want to include her husband, Dwight in that thank you. I would especially like to thank my Bethel and denominational family for their support and encouragement, some of you I have known for many years and others I have recently adopted but you all have a special place in my heart. There were so many friends and supporters not called by name or individually mentioned but definitely not forgotten.

ABSTRACT

Preaching First Person Narrative Sermons to Un-Churched or Marginalized Females is a set of sermons that highlight biblical female characters' stories. In addition to the sermons, the thesis writer evaluated the impact and possibility of transformation in the female listeners. This thesis attempts to discuss the importance of reaching marginalized females. Marginalized females have their own set of circumstances mentioned in the Bible as well as those highlighted in the news. Marginalized refers to various situations that detract from females achieving all they can in life. Another intention of this project is to assist females to perceive that their stories are not that different from Biblical females. As Jesus addressed females in the Bible, he also addresses contemporary females. Utilizing a novel technique, first person narrative sermons, the messages of love and hope Jesus brings is not only for biblical females but for contemporary females as well.

CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEMS OF FIRST PERSON NARRATIVE PREACHING TO FEMALES

[The Year of the LORD's Favor] The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn...

--Isaiah 61:1 NIV

This thesis concerns using first person narrative sermons to preach to un-churched and/or marginalized women. A consensus of scholars agrees that preachers must make the text come alive and that their sermons must be true to the text. The endeavor of the author of this thesis is to use first person narrative “Big Idea”¹ sermons to introduce un-churched and/or marginalized women to marginalized women in the Bible, with the intention to help these contemporary women understand the Biblical story and relate it to how God can move in their lives as well. Additionally this thesis and the culminating project will be in dialogue with using “Big Idea” first person narrative sermons to assist in evangelistic efforts with these marginalized and/or un-churched women.

There are various challenges to preaching first person narrative sermons to un-churched or marginalized women. The streets are compelling and attractive to younger people today. Hip Hop music and the accompanying lure and temptation of the appearance of the good life are immense. Younger people want the material gains they

¹ “Big Idea” preaching is a distinctive school of preaching which Haddon Robinson, Senior Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program and Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has helped to popularize through his seminal work, *Biblical Preaching The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd Edition, (Grand Rapids: MI Baker, 2001).

see on television, in DVDs and videos. When they see money, cars, fancy houses and the attractive opposite sex that the Hip Hop singers have, they want the same things. They may not consider the price that may have to pay to amass these material gains. The church has to compete with these temptations and provide an atmosphere where people especially women of all ages can have their deepest needs met. The economic situation today creates an atmosphere of trying to get what you want at any cost. Preaching should be one large aspect of attracting young people, especially women, to church today and then keeping them.

It appears that Haddon Robinson and this thesis writer agree that: “In the last twenty years, the culture has changed. Television and the computer have influenced the ways we learn and think. Narrative preaching has come into vogue and reflects the reality that listeners in a television culture think with pictures in their heads.”²

Preaching should be a component of the entire church experience to motivate people to come to hear from God and then turn their thoughts and lives around. First person narrative preaching can reach women where they are. Women require preaching that makes the scripture relevant to their lives, and the authors of the Bible wrote it in various genres to do just that. The contemporary preacher of the Gospel should relate to the congregation in that same manner. Big Idea first person narrative preaching may be an integral aspect of introducing un-churched and or marginalized women to a new perspective of ‘church’. Alice Mathews states, “There is a famine in our land for the Word of the Lord. The audience is complex. But God somehow reaches a diverse group

² Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 10.

of people with life-changing truth when we give attention to all three functional questions, speaking God's Word to modern and postmodern listeners.³

Since the preaching style focused on in this thesis is "Big Idea" first person narrative preaching, it is important to have a discourse this sermon style and the usage of it with un-churched and/or marginalized women. "Big Idea" first person narrative preaching generally contains the following characteristics. It begins with the biblical text as was intended by the writers and characters.

First, consider the style of preaching referred to as 'Big Idea' preaching. Some consider "Big Idea" preaching as a viable homiletic method since the 20th century. Haddon Robinson is one of the leaders in the use of "Big Idea" preaching.

Willhite discusses Robinson's concept of "Big Idea" preaching by arguing that the only way to say "thus saith the Lord" is to say what the Bible says. Big idea (sic) preaching is propositional preaching -- a notion that has been the topic of much discussion in academic homiletical circles. Propositional preaching does not mean woodenly deductive. Rather, it means that the intention of the sermon is to use the most effective means to communicate the "big idea" of the biblical text. Robinson says, "Ideally, each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture." The text may say many things but the sermon should focus on the synthesis of the "big idea" behind the many statements of a given text.⁴

Second first person preaching is preaching from the point of view of one of the characters and speaking in the first person. Writing literary pieces involves framing the narrative around the characters. Haddon Robinson defines a first person sermon in the same manner as he defines a dramatic monologue. These are similar to first person expository sermons too.

³ Alice P. Matthews, *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 91.

⁴ Mark A. Johnson, "Big Idea of Biblical Preaching" Honors Work of Haddon Robinson, <http://www.preaching.com/book-reviews/11567372/page-1/> (Accessed July 27, 2010).

A dramatic monologue is a sermon preached from the viewpoint of an eyewitness to an event. A first person sermon is the same as a dramatic monologue. A first person expository sermon is an expository sermon preached from a first-person perspective. In other words, this preaching form is based on an accurate interpretation of the Scripture and applies its meaning to the hearers. It does this through the retelling of scriptural account from the vantage point of a character who was part of the story.⁵

Jesus was at the well, and he spoke to the Samaritan woman when she came to draw water. Jesus asked, “Will you give me a drink?” That is the beginning of Jesus’ dramatic dialogue with a Samaritan woman (John 4:7). The woman answered his questions with many first person statements. “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” Her perspective provides a way for first person preaching of this text.

One of the criticisms of first person narration is that the narrative is limited to the thoughts, sensitivities and impressions of the first person character. However, in this biblical narrative, as well as the others studied in this thesis, using one of the characters to tell the story from his or her point of view is quite effective. When the thesis writer preaches the Hip-Hop woman at the well sermon and uses words that she imagines she would use if Jesus approached her today, the audience she is trying to reach should be able to relate to her monologue.

Third, narrative preaching is the telling of a story. Narrative preaching involves tell the narrative from the first person point of view through the eyes of a character involved in or witnessing the happenings. Third person point of view where the narrator is not actually involved in the happenings of the story is another technique of narrative preaching. “A third person narrative is a story communicated by a narrator who is not

⁵ Haddon W. Robinson and Torrey W. Robinson, *It's All In How You Tell It* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2003), 7.

part of the story being told. For example, in his Gospel, Luke gives a third-person account of the life of Jesus.⁶ Luke also introduces the narrative that occurred at the home of Martha and Mary by using the third person perspective. “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him” (Luke 10:38).

When one preaches, one has to consider the audience. The audience can be several types of congregants. Some preachers believe that they must reach everyone in the audience. That is idealistic, but rarely possible. Someone once told the writer of this thesis that if you reach just one person in the congregation you do your job with that particular preached sermon. Whenever this writer enters the pulpit, she attempts to touch or reach everybody but realizes that this is not usually possible.

Before one stands before the congregation, preparation is essential. When one stands before the congregation, there are various requirements to address. The un-churched come in to churches but will turn around and go back out somewhat like a revolving door if there is nothing to attract them or hold their attention. If the message is not hearer friendly or relevant, they will not get what they require. The churched population does not make it easy for the un-churched sometimes. Align the message and the scripture with one another and the audience.

The un-churched are the ones who do not attend church or did not regularly attend church in the past. Rick Warren views the un-churched as the most sizable component of the potential church population.

The Community. This is your starting point. It is the pool of lost people that live within driving distance of your church. They’ve made no commitment at all to

⁶ Robinson and Robinson, *It's All In How You Tell It*, 8.

either Jesus Christ or your church. They are the unchurched (sic) who you want to reach. This is where evangelism takes place—in your community. It is the largest circle because it contains the most people.⁷

Warren continues his discussion of the un-churched by citing an example from his own church's experience. He appears to use the word "community" to specify the "un-churched".

As Saddleback church has grown, we've narrowed our definition of the community to refer to people we call "unchurched occasional attenders." (sic) If you visit Saddleback service at least four times in a year (and indicate it with a registration card or offering envelope), your name gets put on the "community" database in our computer. These are our hottest evangelistic prospects. As I write this we have over twenty-eight thousand names of occasional attenders of Saddleback. This represents about 10 percent of our area. Our ultimate goal of course is total penetration of our community, giving everyone a chance to hear about Christ.⁸

Why differentiate between the churched and the un-churched when embarking on a homiletic journey? The churched and the un-churched require different messages and have a different rationale for hearing the Gospel. The un-churched come in and leave because of various reasons but a negative atmosphere created in the church by some of those who consider themselves the family of believers need not be one. A boring sermon should not be an element of that disappearance either.

First person narrative preaching can engage the un-churched and the biblically illiterate. The un-churched are so familiar with media and fast-paced stories. They watch action-filled movies on television and in the cinema. They are enticed by new trends in technology such as 3D movies, iPods, DVD players that travel wherever they go. They

⁷ Rick Warren, "The Purpose Driven Church: A Contemporary Approach to Church Growth", Timothy Beougher and Alvin Reid, eds., *Evangelism for a Changing World*, (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 2003), 24.

⁸ Warren, "The Purpose Driven Church: A Contemporary Approach to Church Growth", 24.

may even spend the time that churchgoers are in church engaged in listening to and watching those other mediums.

It may be easier to preach using first person narrative to the un-churched women because un-churched women do not arrive with preconceived notions or expectations about the ensuing sermon. One problem with preaching to the churched is some of them believe they know the Bible. They may say they were born and raised AME, Baptist or Church of God and already know a considerable amount about the doctrines and polity of their church or denomination. They may even feel that they are involved in the work of evangelism and require a more contemporary or new idea about the Bible. Sometimes these people who believe they know the Bible do know certain scriptures they quote, but they are not really living the way the Bible tells one to live. Knowing just a few scriptures does not qualify one to go out and spread the Gospel. First person narrative preaching may assist even churched women to gain a fuller sense of scripture and its relevance to the un-churched. Although first person narrative preaching can assist in this effort, it is not the only way. First person narrative preaching can draw people in. and then the church can introduce them to other aspects of the church experience.

What and Who are Marginalized Women?

Since the fall and throughout history members of society have marginalized women. Take a glimpse of Eve in the Garden of Eden. God created Adam first and then decided that he was in need of companionship; thus, God created Eve from Adams rib bone (Genesis 1:26, 2:21-23). One adage attempts to supplant a message of inferiority that society placed on women for ages. “Woman was taken out of man; not out of his

head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled underfoot; but out of his side to be equal to him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.”⁹

The serpent enticed Eve; she sinned, then encouraged Adam and shared that sin with Adam. The Bible references marginalized from that point throughout. There are women like Lot’s daughters who thought that since there was no man around they would make their own way for their family to continue. Lot’s daughters decided to get their father drunk and lie with him to preserve the family line (Genesis 19:31, 32 NIV). Esther is among the marginalized because she did not have parents to care for her. Then when she became of age, she had to follow in the footsteps of the dethroned Vashti who because of her unwillingness to comply with the king’s command to parade before the men at his feast. Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah were marginalized because they were widows and in need of a man or kinsman-redemer to care for them. Naomi and Ruth traveled to Naomi’s home to try to make a life for themselves. Naomi, a widow, lost her sons, and was in a foreign land, feeling like even God had forsaken her.

In the late 1800s, American women were concerned with their situation and their plight. They recognized that they were at the very least marginalized and definitely denied the rights that men had fought the British to gain. They decided to convene and transform their lives.

The Women’s Rights Movement marks July 13, 1848 as its beginning. On that sweltering summer day in upstate New York, a young housewife and mother, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was invited to tea with four women friends. When the course of their conversation turned to the situation of women, Stanton poured out her discontent with the limitations placed on her own situation under America’s new democracy. Hadn’t the American Revolution been fought just 70 years earlier to win the patriots freedom from tyranny? But women had not gained freedom even though they’d taken equally tremendous risks through those dangerous years.

⁹ This is an anonymous quote relating to the relationship of men and women.

Surely the new republic would benefit from having its women play more active roles throughout society. Stanton's friends agreed with her, passionately. This was definitely not the first small group of women to have such a conversation, but it was the first to plan and carry out a specific, large-scale program.¹⁰

Society holds marginalized contemporary women to the same standards as men.

Women and children suffer with hunger, homelessness, and the ills that affect society far more than men do. Society judges women by the same standards as men although there are biological and psychological differences. Society marginalizes women merely by the fact that they are women. Mathews gives underlying information relative to this consideration of women as marginalized.

Several decades ago, Inge Broverman published the results of a classic study of stereotypes for men and women. In that study, mental health clinicians were given a list of 122 character traits. Some of the clinicians were asked to choose the characteristics that best described a mature, healthy adult *man*. Others were asked to choose the characteristics of a mature, healthy adult *woman*. Still others were asked to choose the characteristics of a mature, healthy adult, sex unspecified. The results of this study showed a high correlation between the lists for a healthy adult man and a healthy adult. But the correlation between the healthy adult woman and the healthy adult was much lower. A woman, in the thinking of these mental health professionals, could not be a healthy woman and adult at the same time because a healthy rating corresponded to masculine characteristics. The psychotherapists in this study declared women mentally healthy only if they conformed to the culturally accepted picture of the stereotypical woman: passive, dependent, childlike, accepting of her biologically inferior status.¹¹

Language, Jargon and Vocabulary

Using language and vocabulary that the listener can understand is critical for comprehension. Especially in the formal denominational churches, there can be a kind of “Christianese” language. For example, “Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?” Words should be used that can be understood by the average person coming in off the

¹⁰ Legacy '98 A Short History of the Movement, “Living the Legacy: The Women's Rights Movement 1848 – 1998”, *History of the Movement*, <http://www.legacy98.org/move-hist.html>, (Accessed January 29, 2011).

¹¹ Mathews, *Preaching That Speaks to Women*, 57.

streets. If you are preaching to the un-churched, you have to speak a language that they understand. They probably do not understand theological terms. Not only is it imperative to speak using vocabulary they understand, it is essential to welcome them and reach them where they are. Sometimes people disperse from church services and verbalize a misunderstanding of the sermon. Using vocabulary that the layperson can understand should not be condescending or belittling to the listeners but just engaging.

The thesis writer recalls attending a worship service and the preacher who was also an instructor at a very prestigious divinity school used the word exegesis in his sermon. This thesis writer preached the sermon at a church where the congregation consists of some doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers and other highly educated professionals. The writer was completing her Masters of Divinity at that time. An acquaintance at that church wrote a note and passed it to her. She asked her what the word exegesis meant. Not all the members of the church are theologians or even college educated. Additionally one should not make assumptions about the educational background of the visitors on any given Sunday either.

When preachers use academic or theological jargon, they must define the terms for the layperson. It is not expeditious or advantageous to use scholarly language in sermons especially those preached in the local church. Preachers have to be able to speak a language that the congregation understands. One element of effective preaching is taking technical Biblical theological language and expressing its ideas in simple, comprehensible and culturally sensitive manners. By its very nature, first person narrative preaching is more of a conversation than a lecture, so that technical terminology is less

likely in it. For example, one can explain even culturally unfamiliar Biblical details in the course of the narrative.

Since this thesis is primarily concerned with reaching the marginalized, it is essential to understand how to interact with and use the current and culturally sensitive terminology to speak to this segment of the population. It is important to recognize and incorporate appropriate language for a marginalized audience. In order to introduce the reader of this paper to culturally acceptable terminology the following information was gathered.

Positive language empowers. When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put the person first. Group designations such as "the blind," "the retarded" or "the disabled" are inappropriate because they do not reflect the individuality, equality or dignity of people with disabilities. Further, words like "normal person" imply that the person with a disability isn't normal, whereas "person without a disability" is descriptive but not negative. The accompanying information shows examples of positive and negative phrases. Negative Phrases are retarded; mentally defective the blind the disabled; handicapped the deaf; deaf and dumb; suffers a hearing loss. Others are afflicted by MS; CP victim; epileptic; confined or restricted to a wheelchair; stricken by MD; crippled; lame; deformed; dumb; mute; crazy; nuts; has overcome his/her disability; is courageous (when it implies the person has courage because of having a disability). Affirmative phrases are those such as a person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability; person who is blind; person with a disability; person who is visually impaired; person who is deaf, person who is hard of hearing. Additional positive phrases are person who has multiple sclerosis; person with cerebral palsy; person with epilepsy; person with seizure disorder; person who uses a wheelchair; person who has muscular dystrophy; person with a physical disability; physically disabled; unable to speak; uses synthetic speech; person with psychiatric disability; person who is successful; productive. Etiquette considered appropriate when interacting with people with disabilities is based primarily on respect and courtesy.¹²

¹² Office of Disability Employment Policy; the Media Project, Research and Training Center on Independent Living, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS; and the National Center for Access Unlimited, Chicago, IL., October 1995, Updated August 2002, www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/comucate.htm. (Accessed February 15, 2010).

Understanding how to communicate with people with disabilities is important when attempting to deliver homilies. Churches today are evolving and must do so to keep up with the diverse populations of the twenty-first century. Communicating the Bible in a homiletic message requires various themes and genres. Knowing how to use culturally sensitive language should help the first person sermon writer to integrate this terminology into the sermon.

The writer of this thesis is convinced that first person narrative preaching is the homiletic technique to use. Initially when she experienced the magnitude of Dr. Haddon Robinson's "Big Idea" preaching in a Doctor of the Ministry residency, it mesmerized her. She was mesmerized with the way he could talk about a little church in the "Chicken Dinner"¹³ in a "Big Idea" sermon and those present received the theological relevance of it. She said that she could do that and she wanted to do it. However, the thesis writer also wondered if African American congregations were ready for it and if she could make this approach one of her own approaches.

Therefore, when her instructor assigned the author the Martha and Mary story from Luke 10:38-42, she developed a first person narrative sermon entitled, "What's for Dinner"? That same week she preached her first revival. She had already written the traditional sermon based upon that scripture. Now her task was to incorporate what she was learning into her current preaching techniques. She preached the sermon for her class, received positive feedback and encouragement from her fellow classmates. During her doctoral program, the author was the only woman in her residences, but even her

¹³ Haddon Robinson, "Church of God and Christ Chicken Restaurant", Library of Center for Preaching, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, *Preaching Parables*, found on sound recording, Scott Gibson, ed. 2008.

male classmates were impressed and moved. One classmate in particular shared an encouraging word that facilitated her ability to make first person narratives a part of her new preaching style. He said to her as they discussed their sermons, that her sermon preparation made him think of “KISS”. He explained to her, “Keep it Simple Sister.”¹⁴ That eventually became one of the titles for her Mary and Martha first person sermon.

The revival was an awesome experience. It occurred at an African American church off Blue Hill Avenue in Mattapan, Massachusetts. Before she preached the traditional sermon, she preached the first person narrative sermon. She saw Jesus coming, welcomed him in, sat on the floor and listened to his every word as she told the story from the first person point of view. She became Mary that Wednesday night and the congregation loved it. She went onto preach the traditional sermon at the first revival she ever preached. Although preaching has been her passion since she accepted the call to ministry, as a novice a revival carries a huge responsibility. A revival happened for the people that night. The Baptist pastor told her, “When my people came to me and said they wanted an AME female preacher for one night of the revival, I was apprehensive but I am so glad we had you, I didn’t think an AME, especially a woman, could preach like that but you were inspirational and wonderful.”¹⁵ This thesis writer has since used that dramatic sermon when she teaches Bible studies for women’s ministries. She also continues to use it as a scripture reading too. Accordingly, depending on the venue, she uses the Luke 10:38-42 dramatizations as the sermon while at other times she it uses it primarily as the scripture reading.

Although she was comfortable with “Big Idea” first person narrative preaching,

¹⁴ Revival Sermon, May 14, 2003.

¹⁵ Pastor Yard, interview May 14, 2003.

she was not sure the listeners would be comfortable with it or receptive. She also thought that the congregation and the senior pastor would feel she had not fulfilled her preaching requirement if she did not include the ordinary sermon style they were familiar with in that church. The older and more traditional African American parishioners might balk at the idea of not having “three points and a poem”. However, since the un-churched and marginalized women might be able to relate more easily to a novel and different preaching perspective and technique, this risk has been more than worth it.

First person narrative preaching is not easy and painless. For example, the author recently heard in a social situation with a pastor an African American Baptist Church is involved in a search for a senior pastor because they are not happy with the current pastor primarily as the result of her bringing too many props into the pulpit to preach her sermon.¹⁶

There is a viable rationale for using first person preaching as an evangelistic tool. When one has had, it confirmed that she could be an evangelist, it is important to develop and use that gift. Although evangelism is just one, gift in ministry it is an important one and cannot be overlooked. After accepting the call to the ministry, this writer shared that call with her pastor at the time and proceeded on a path toward ordination. She also shared this call with a member of the church and she said, “I can see you being an evangelist”. The writer of this thesis was not fully aware of what it meant to be an evangelist especially in the African American tradition or the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Throughout her years on this ministerial journey, several people have reiterated that same sentiment that her ministry might be one of evangelism.

¹⁶ September 12, 2010 (All interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement).

Recently someone reinforced for her that evangelism might be an important component of her ministry when she received a phone call and was informed that she would be the preacher for Evangelism Day at the African Methodist Episcopal Church New England Annual Conference on May 11, 2010.¹⁷ It was a blessing and an honor for this thesis writer because the Bishop chose her to preach at the annual conference. Another pastor told her that it is an honor for the bishop to choose her to preach at the annual conference. That honor is just a minute component of the blessing, which that preacher felt. Having it reinforced that evangelism is one of her gifts and callings is the epitome of the experience. First person preaching is especially important for evangelism of un-churched and marginalized women since it is so immediate and accessible.

This writer realizes there were people in the church (the churched) as well as those who never heard the Word, (the un-churched and marginalized) who need enlightenment. It seems necessary to introduce the people to God initially through the preached Word that includes a Biblical background. Therefore, this thesis and the ensuing project particularly focus on using first person narrative preaching to un-churched and marginalized women. The Gospel tells Christians to preach the good news to the poor (Luke 4:18). The poor are definitely in the category of marginalized.

Who Are the Churched?

The churched are those who enter the doors of established churches almost every Sunday. They are also those who may have professed a saving grace, repeated the prayer of salvation and seek to do whatever God commands them to do.

¹⁷ AME Church NEAC took place from Tuesday, May 11, 2010 to Sunday, May 16, 2010. Regarding sermon preached at the Evangelism Day Noonday Worship Service.

Who Are the Un-churched and the Marginalized?

When the thesis writer considers the marginalized, she realizes that the elderly or senior citizens are members of that group as are the young including children, teenagers and young adults. Additionally society marginalizes the mentally challenged, the physically handicapped, substance abusers, homeless and those who are poor in monetary goods or spiritually poor. Sources describing un-churched demographics are critical to highlight the relevance of preaching to this population.

According to the survey results published on March 28, 2005 by the Barna Group, “despite widespread efforts to increase church attendance across the nation one-third of all adults (34%) remain ‘unchurched.’”¹⁸ This particular piece of the study contains no definition of the term un-churched other than implications that people who do not go to a church building comprise the un-churched.

Then as the author of this thesis read the book about growing, a church from the outside in, there is information about just whom the un-churched might be. Barna’s research categorizes the un-churched by using the population subgroup. His study revealed, “39% of the males and 28% of the females were unchurched.” In terms of ethnicity of the un-churched, “34% were white, 23% were black and 34% were Hispanic”¹⁹ of those queried. He went further to state that of those researched, “Abstaining from church life is less palatable to African Americans than to other ethnic segments of America.”²⁰ It appears that African Americans are more apt to find religious

¹⁸George Barna, “One in Three Adults is Unchurched”, 03/28/10, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/182-one-in-three-adults-is-unchurched>, (Accessed January, 29, 2011).

¹⁹ George Barna, *Grow Your Church From the Outside In: Understanding the Unchurched and How to Reach Them*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2002), 646.

²⁰ George Barna, *Grow Your Church From the Outside In*. 615.

participation to be desirable. From the Barna research it has been ascertained that, “About half of all unchurched adults were formerly churched people.”²¹ “Un-churched people according to Barna’s research are defined as people who have not attended a Christian service at any time during the past six months, other than special events such as weddings and funerals.”²²

One of the reasons that this project is necessary is because the marginalization occurred throughout history and is still abundant. Eve was the first but is not the only example of a marginalized Biblical woman. She was marginalized by the serpent and then again by Adam in his response to God when apprehended for their sin. Another marginalized woman in the Old Testament of the Bible is Bathsheba. David sees and spies on Bathsheba as she is on the rooftop during her private bathing time. He summons her to come to him. He has his way with her. She is another marginalized woman in the Bible.

In 2 Samuel 11–12, David is clearly the protagonist or leading character. The surrounding chapters confirm this. Obviously, Bathsheba plays a prominent role in the story. However, the narrator portrays her more as a character who is acted upon rather than as a character who acts. Her husband, Uriah, is the other major character in this story. He functions as a foil, that is, as a character who provides a contrast to another character, in this case, David.²³

The woman at the well is an example of an un-churched woman in the New Testament reference. She was living an unholy life but once she met Jesus, he told her everything she had ever done, her life changed and she proceeded to spread the Gospel. Although Martha was not un-churched, she was a marginalized woman in the Bible. She

²¹ George Barna, *Grow Your Church From the Outside In.* 402.

²² George Barna, *Grow Your Church From the Outside In.* 311.

²³ Paul Borden and Steven D. Mathewson, *Preaching Today Sermon*, “The Big Idea of Narrative Preaching, What are the Clues to Interpreting a Story?”
<http://www.preachingtodaysermons.com/bigidofnapr.html>, (Accessed July 29, 2009).

was so busy preparing for the physical meal that she did not take the time to just spend time with Jesus and listen to his teaching. The marginalization of Esther occurred by her first being an orphan and then being brought in before the king after Vashti decided not to go to the king and his men. Naomi was marginalized because first her husband died and then her sons. She was a widow who was living in a foreign land without a man to care for her. She also felt like a victim because she decided that God had forsaken her. These are the marginalized biblical women chosen for study and homiletic preparation.

Expository first person preaching is an excellent technique for preaching to those living in the twenty-first century. Today's society is in a fast paced and constantly changing world where people encounter innumerable amounts of information in a short span of time. The world pushes so much onto its individual members, and bombards people with new information every minute. There are so many decisions people have to make every day. One of those decisions is whether they are going to accept Jesus Christ and life salvation. The preached Word should at the very least encourage and motivate the people to turn their lives around and receive Christ as their personal Savior.

The kind of female the thesis writer wants to reach with her preaching is the one who may feel like no one cares or understands her pain and hardships. She wants to address and speak to the one who may have had to make a difficult decision about problems in her life. There are women who have been court involved or even a victim of a perpetrator. The thesis writer wants to reach young females who are developing habits and making choices about their lives. She wants to reach the young women who are on the streets believing that dressing in a provocative manner is the only option available to them.

On a particular day in court while preparing to wait for jury selection a minister noticed a young marginalized woman waiting to appear before the judge. The young woman was dressed like a “hoochie” appearing before the judge in a very seductive dress. A hoochie according to the Urban Dictionary is a woman who dresses in a sexually provocative manner and may have that same negative kind of attitude and demeanor.²⁴ The woman did not want her abuser confined to prison. She just wanted to file a restraining order against him; she just wanted the judge to keep that abusive man away from her. The woman as well as her abuser is in need of a paradigm shift in their attitudes.

Preaching is not just, what happens in the pulpit on Sunday morning. It is happens from Monday to Saturday and in the other arenas where the un-churched and marginalized women congregate. Things heard and learned in church are integral components

Preachers sometimes seem to be reflecting the world instead of Christ. They may not take the time to use the Biblical text to assist people to move closer to Jesus and realize that Jesus cares for the least of them. In the Bible, people went past the marginalized beggar and finally the Good Samaritan stopped. Sometimes all you have to do is just take the time to acknowledge someone. Even holy men and women cannot be so busy on their way to church or wherever and forget what God said, “He will answer them, “I can guarantee this truth: Whatever you failed to do for one of my brothers or

²⁴ Urban Dictionary.com, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=hoochie>, (Accessed January 29, 2011).

sisters, no matter how unimportant [they seemed], you failed to do for me" (Matthew 25:45).

This thesis-project will attempt to determine the spiritual growth and Biblical knowledge as a result of preaching six first person narrative "Big Idea" sermons to un-churched and/or marginalized females. The thesis writer will preach half of the sermons from Old Testament stories and base the other half upon New Testament scriptures. She will administer a survey and or have personal interview before the sermon and then re-administer it following the sermon to determine how engaged un-churched/or marginalized listeners are. The results will also show how effective they feel the preaching is and how well the sermon and its style helped them to engage more fully with God and his Word. The females will come from various neighborhoods in Massachusetts. Most will reside in the Greater Boston area. The thesis writer will invite females to a Bible study where she will hold a worship service as a component of the Bible study. She will preach some sermons at the regular Sunday morning worship service at churches of various denominations but alternatively she will hold some in the evening or on a Saturday.

Using first person "Big Idea" narrative preaching to reach un-churched or marginalized women should help them to begin to develop gifts or talents that they may not have realized that they could utilize in the church. The Free Methodist sum up preaching the pure and simple gospel to this population of females in the following manner: "Furthermore, under the influence of inspired, biblical preaching, young men

and women will be led to follow God's call to preach the gospel. Jesus came preaching. Those truly called by Him will also come to their task preaching.”²⁵

²⁵ *Free Methodist Church, Book of Discipline*, The Free Methodist Publishing House, Light and Life Communications, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2004), Par. A/904, 94.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICALLY SPEAKING OF FIRST PERSON NARRATIVES FOR FEMALES

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done".

--John 4:39 NIV

The Great Commission mandates us to: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15).¹ Therefore the Gospel is made to be preached and preached to all the churched, the un-churched and the marginalized. "Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others" (Acts 15:35). Sometimes it is necessary for the preacher to go back to check on the people to whom they have preached and who have accepted Christ as their personal Savior as the Apostle Paul often did. Then after some days, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing" (Acts 15:36).

The Bible states this about Jesus' ministry and his modeling for his followers. "At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.' And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea" (Luke 4:42-44).

Jesus, his disciples, and other Biblical characters admonish Christians and ministers to preach the gospel. In Acts, 16:10 after Timothy joined Paul and Silas and this strengthened the church in faith (Acts 16:1-5), Paul had a vision about preaching the gospel and that vision included a man of Macedonia. This man requested that Paul come

¹ Biblical references are from the NIV or another standard translation of the Bible.

to where he and his people were and help them. Sometimes one may receive a call to forgo the planned journey or agenda and go because someone needs to hear the preached Word. Someone might be in the wilderness or in an unforeseen place and call out for the word of the Lord. That was true in the account in the book of Acts. It states the following.

“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:9-10).

Rationale for Preaching the Old Testament in First Person Narrative

First person narrative ‘Big Idea’ preaching does not just correspond to New Testaments scriptures. Thus, this thesis project includes Old Testament sermons and scriptures as well. It is important to consider the Bible as a whole and follow that consideration in exegesis and homiletics. According to Walter C. Kaiser Jr., teaching from the Old Testament is crucial and most effective in the same literary style as the Biblical text. He states the following:

If we are to have a balanced and full ministry, we must preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) to the whole person. Neglect of any area of Scripture will provide the fertile soil for either heresy to grow in the church or, in the merciful providence of God, for a parachurch ministry to reclaim what has been neglected or deliberately set aside by the preaching ministry of the church.²

The Old Testament is relevant to the church of the New Millennium just as the New Testament is. In attempting to synthesize and comprehend the New Testament the Old Testament is just as important.

² Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching From The Old Testament: A Guide for the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 44.

Our teaching and preaching of the Old Testament must be balanced in its use of genre, encompassing all types of literature and emphases found in the Old Testament. Therefore it must include praise, but also lament; it must treat prose passages, but also poetic passages. As there are didactic texts, there are just as surely narratives. Sound, balance teaching and preaching must include legal, proverbial, historical, eschatological, doctrinal, ethical, prophetic, wisdom, and apocalyptic texts from the older testament.

It can be said with confidence that without clear teaching from the Old Testament, the church and modern thought suffer. So many modern issues, such as the sanctity of truth, marriage, property, the heart, and its motives, fine their best undergirding and direction from the teaching of the Old Testament.³

Biblical Perspective for Preaching to the Marginalized

Everyone needs to hear the gospel, read the Bible and experience good preaching.

None needs to be under God's wings and sitting at his feet more than overlooked, overexposed and overworked women. The hymn writer said it so eloquently in the song, "Take the World and Give Me Jesus." Yes take the world and give me Jesus; all its joys are but a name.⁴ Martha and Mary had it reinforced for them on the day Jesus came to dinner and Martha was worried and distracted by too many things to spend time with the Master. Jesus told the guests at Mary and Martha's house that Mary had chosen that which is better and it would not be taken from her. Jesus is the better part and in fact, he is the best part.

In Luke 4:18 NIV the importance of preaching to the marginalized is stressed, The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18 NIV).

³ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching From The Old Testament*, 45.

⁴ Fannie Crosby, Hymn 302, "Take the World, but Give Me Jesus", *The Covenant Hymnal*.

Jesus cares about all people and wants his followers to do the same. One of the scriptures used in a homily in this project is the story of the woman at the well. The following quote sheds light on the fact that Christ cares about all people despite their imperfections and transgressions.

Each person matters to Jesus. The story of the woman of Samaria teaches us that each person matters to Jesus. Why did he choose to go through Samaria on this journey? Usually he would have gone the longer way. It seems that he went just to meet this woman. He wanted to bring new life to her. As a result, the town of Sychar heard about Jesus. A number of times Jesus went out of his way to meet just one person. See Mark 5. The story also teaches us this. Jesus offers to forgive everyone. He offers new life to all, even if they have been very wicked. Jesus also came for people from every nation. His kingdom is for everybody, from every country and every culture. Perhaps his visit prepared the way for this command to the disciples. Before he returned to heaven, he told them: Acts 1:8: But the Holy Spirit will come on you with power. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and in all the world. [That is, in every country].⁵

Biblical Perspective for Preaching to, about and with Women

In a paper attempting to engage preaching to marginalized and un-churched women, it is important to consider how preaching to women is addressed or not in the Bible. It is also necessary to reflect on the women of the Bible and the theological insight into women's issues.

In *Preaching that Speaks to Women* by Alice P. Matthews, she states that,

The reasonableness of the Ten Commandments emerged in new ways when placed in the context of my relationship with God.

The connection should not have surprised me, for Jesus made the link clear for those of us who follow him. One day, a Pharisee who was also a lawyer attempted to trap Jesus with a trick question. He asked, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus answered, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets"

⁵ Barrie Wetherill, *The Life of Jesus Christ - Chapter 3* – "People who met Jesus during his early work for God" - Part 4, 2002-2005, Wycliffe Associates (UK), http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-study/jesus-life/woman_at_the_well.htm (Accessed August 12, 2010).

(Matt. 22:36-39) Loving God and loving others together summarize not only the Ten Commandments but also all the Law and the Prophets. To keep us from sentimentalizing our relationship with God, however, Jesus reminds us that this love for God flows out of a whole heart, a whole soul and a whole mind. This chapter and those that follow will explore how that plays out in our daily lives—and into preaching to women.⁶

Matthew's above statements assist in conveying the message that there is an important component of the Bible that incorporates women's issues particularly as a separate one from those of men.

The scriptures and women chosen for this theological reflection and resultant sermons are from the Old Testament Book of Ruth chapter one, Orpah's insight. Then from the book of Esther 4:1-17, Esther's story is included. From the New Testament the Book of Luke 4:1-42, The thesis writer will exegete the narrative of the woman at the well told from her point of view.. Finally in the Book of Luke 10:38-42, Martha's perspective of Jesus' teaching at the home of Martha and Mary is included.

The Old Testament narratives from the scriptures of Ruth and Esther are significant for at least a couple of reasons. In authenticating the relevance of using Old Testament women for preaching to un-churched and marginalized women, highlights that the issues the women in these scriptures endured have relevance to some of the issues women encounter in the twenty-first century.

Ruth, Naomi and Orpah had to continue to exist after the loss of their husbands. They were widows, alone and without men to care for them. This was a difficult lifestyle for women living in the Old Testament, as well as in our society. Another OT narrative example of a woman and children being marginalized is when Tamar is married to Judah. According to Robert Alter, one might classify Tamar's existence as tenuous.

⁶ Matthews, *Preaching That Speaks to Women*, 30-31.

In a triad of verbs that admits nothing adventitious, Judah sees, takes and lies with a woman; and she, responding appropriately, conceives, bears, and---the necessary completion of the genealogical process---gives the son a name. Then with no narrative indication of any events at all in the intervening time, we move ahead an entire generation to the inexplicable death ("was evil in the sight of the LORD") of Er, Judah's firstborn, after his marriage to Tamar. The firstborn very often seems to be losers in

Genesis by the very condition of their birth---the epithet "firstborn, hardly needed as identification, is asserted twice here, almost as though it explained why Er displeased God---while an inscrutable, unpredictable principle of election other than the "natural" one works itself out. The second son, Onan, however, makes the mistake of rebelling by coitus interruptus against the legal obligations of the system primogeniture, refusing to act as his dead brother's proxy by impregnating the widow in his brother's name, so he, too, dies.⁷

There are orphaned females in the Old Testament such as Esther. There are abused females such as Tamar when her brother accosted and molested her. There are females such as Rahab and Bathsheba who all had crosses to bear. In spite of the challenges endured by each of these women, there is something special about Ruth and her story. Alexander Lewis states the following: "If you are a woman, read Ruth. A man of practical life, a great man, but purely a man of the world, once said to me: 'If I could enact one statute for women of America, it would be that each of them should read the Book of Ruth once a month'".⁸

Hastings addresses some of the challenges females encounter on a regular basis in the Old Testament. He shares the following interpretation of the lives of four women and three of them have stories, which shed light on the pitiful plight of some females in the Bible.

In his genealogy of our Lord, St. Mathew inscribes the names of only four women---Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba; and among these four, Ruth easily holds the pre-eminence. Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba were all women of dubious

⁷ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (New York, NY: Basic, 2011), 5-6.

⁸ Alexander Lewis, *Sermons Preached in England*, (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1906),

virtue, even when judged by the standards of antiquity; but, judged by the moral standard of any age, Ruth is not only pure and sweet as the fields in which she gleaned, she rises to an heroic pitch of unselfish devotion and love.⁹

The story of Tamar in Genesis 38:6-30 involves taking matters into her own hands, masquerading as a prostitute, seducing her father-in-law, thus becoming pregnant out of wedlock. Her crossing the line, taking the risks to ensure that she becomes a mother of an heir and making herself a perceived criminal, evidences her vulnerability. Rahab's story in the Books of Joshua, Judges and James in the Bible, entails actually being a lady of the night or prostitute and eventually doing a good deed by hiding two spies for God's side. Some of these also might be overarching themes in the lives of contemporary females. Bathsheba's story may be the most tenuous of all these mentioned women. The Bible speaks of the marginalization of Bathsheba and Vashti partially as related to their beauty (II Samuel 11:2-5).

Surviving as a widow alone is one of the ills facing women today as in Biblical narratives. The plight and situation of widows changed over time in the Bible.

Widows are silent ones, expressing their legal status as not spoken for (Heb. almaban, from the root alem, “unable to speak”)... The legal status of widows varied in biblical cultures. In Hebrew tradition widowhood was misfortune and even disgraceful (Ruth 1:20-21). A widow could return to her family only if her bride price were repaid. She was expected to await levirate marriage or public refusal (Deut 25:5-10). Little provision was made for widows; as a consequence, God is viewed as their protector (Ps 68:5) who will “heed their cry” (Ex 22:23; Deut 10:18; Ps 146:9) and bring them justice. The covenant code links relationship to God with response to such poor and oppressed (see Ex 22:21-22; Deut 10:18; 14:28-29)...Since according to Genesis 38:14, 19 widows wore special clothing, ignorance was no excuse for noncompliance with regulations. Women's status was lower than men's, and widows were the lowest women.¹⁰

⁹ James Hastings, *The Great Texts of the Bible, Vol. 2 Deuteronomy-Esther*, (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), 218.

¹⁰ Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, ed., *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 745.

The Old Testament narratives gives widows a particular place.

The OT views widows, with the father-less, as vulnerable members of society. Thus, OT law singles them out for special consideration. No one is to take advantage of a widow (Ex 22:22) but must defend “the cause of the fatherless and the widow” (Dt 10:18). The special institutions established in law for the poor mentions widows as beneficiaries (Dt 24:19-21; 26:12-13). Thus OT psalms celebrate God by saying that he “watches over the alien widow, and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked” (146:9).¹¹

Thus in the New Testament, the situation had begun to change and then we see how Jesus models taking care of widows and mothers. When Jesus was on the cross about to die, he looked out to his mother and said, Woman, behold your son!” “Then he said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home (John 19:26-27). Jesus was making provision for his mother’ care so she would not be a woman without a man to care for her.

Contemporary women face many challenges. They face divorce, physical and sexual abuse, abandonment, and possibly feeling forced to cohabit. Women today, just as those in the Bible, have the potential to be as victims without male protection or companionship. The marginalization of females can occur in all of these ways. Marginalized women face social, political, and financial challenges, which influence not only society, community, and family but each woman personally as well. A good homiletic message should assist contemporary women in seeing beyond their dire circumstances and see that there is hope in God and Jesus Christ. Additionally using the book of Ruth, the book of Esther, the book of John and the book of Luke, the thesis writer presents marginalized women.

¹¹ Lawrence O. Richards, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 626.

Esther's story displays the situation of two beautiful women. The original plan was to preach this story by writing and using a Hip Hop sermon. As the thesis writer engaged in her exegesis of all the women in scripture that would be included, she concluded that the woman at the well would be the best scripture to preach in Hip Hop language and style. Contemporary women should be able to relate to the problems the woman at the well encountered because those issues reflect the issues they encounter. Some contemporary women are living with men who are not their husbands. Some are intimately involved with one man after another and/or involved with multiple partners. One of the ways to substantiate this is by the statistics of sexually transmitted diseases and other medical issues.

A cursory glance at just about any fashion magazine such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*, *Glamour* or watch commercials on television and one may see how women are provoked to struggle with what society and the media portray as a beautiful woman and how they fit or don't fit into that picture. Although the theme of a woman's beauty is just one in the Esther narrative, it is a significant one when attempting to address the problems and theological solutions for un-churched and marginalized women.

Images of female bodies are everywhere. Women—and their body parts—sell everything from food to cars. Popular film and television actresses are becoming younger, taller and thinner. Some have even been known to faint on the set from lack of food. Women's magazines are full of articles urging that if they can just lose those last twenty pounds, they'll have it all—the perfect marriage, loving children, great sex, and a rewarding career.¹²

¹² "Beauty and Body Image in the Media", Media Awareness Network.
http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_beauty.cfm, 2010
(Accessed February 13, 2011).

The theme of the portrayal of women's beauty is systemic one that contemporary women must contend with on a continual basis.

Jean Kilbourne argues that the overwhelming presence of media images of painfully thin women means that real women's bodies have become invisible in the mass media. The real tragedy, Kilbourne concludes, is that many women internalize these stereotypes, and judge themselves by the beauty industry's standards. Women learn to compare themselves to other women, and to compete with them for male attention. This focus on beauty and desirability "effectively destroys any awareness and action that might help to change that climate."¹³

Theologians and Biblical scholars agree that there are multiple themes interwoven in the Book of Esther. There is the theme of a woman's role in the kingdom (household). An essay located on the Internet supplied insight into the genre and themes of the book of Esther.

Any discussion of the genre of the book of Esther must begin with the acknowledgement that it is written literature, with no stylistic traits of oral literature. The first part is of the affairs on queen [sic] and, the second part is the plot to destroy the Jews and its unsuccessful outcome, and the third part is the festival of Purim. In addition, Wills describes the genre of Esther as a court narrative. The LXX is the Greek translation of the MT. Ahasuerus is not the actual name of the king, but it means the chief of rulers. Christians can relate to this in the sense that being a Christian, a child of God, can be helpful to one's life. Vashti had not groveled but stood up for herself. People have misused it (sic) to call the first man as Adam. Scholars agree that Esther is one of the skillfully written works of that time. The writer wanted the people to know that God is also silent. Esther adds her authorization (9:29-32). In this version, the king asks Vashti to come and join him rather than commanding her to come. Part of the reason for punishing Vashti was that the men did not want the other women in the kingdom to follow her example.¹⁴

¹³ Beauty and Body Image in the Media", Media Awareness Network.

¹⁴ "Exegesis on the Book of Ruth", Megaessays.com, <http://www.megaessays.com/viewpaper/86112.html>, (Accessed August 14,2010).

Preaching Using Literature and Biblical Truths About Women

Since the Bible utilized various genres, preached sermons should use those similar genres. The sermon should also be congruent with the biblical texts. As Arthurs states in the following to highlight the definition of a biblical narrative:

For the present purpose, biblical narrative can be defined as a *historically accurate, artistically sophisticated account of persons and actions in a setting designed to reveal God and edify the reader*. The first phrase of this definition, “historically accurate” affirms the evangelical stance that Scripture speaks truthfully. It does so not only in what Francis Schaeffer calls the “upper story,” the realm of faith and the unseen world, but also in the “lower story” the world of “brute facts.” Having affirmed the Bible’s historicity, the province of this current chapter deals more with the second phrase of the definition: “artistically sophisticated.” Although biblical narrators do not make up events and characters, they do select, arrange, and depict them with skill.¹⁵

The elements of a work of literature are the plot, theme, setting and characters in the story. The Bible is congruent with any other literary piece and contains the same literary elements. First person narrative preaching utilizes characters from a biblical narrative or otherwise suggested by context of a particular genre (e.g. sermon from the shepherd or sheep’s perspective for Psalm 23) thus the preacher will assume the role of one of the characters in the story.

Character

Character plays a pivotal role in a drama, novel, short story and all kinds of narratives. In drama, character reflects the personality of the protagonist and other related characters. The method of conveying information about characters in art is called characterization. Characters can be fictional or based on real, historical entities. It can be human, supernatural, mythical, divine, animal or personifications of an abstraction. There are round characters, flat characters, stereotypical stock characters, etc. In Marlowe’s drama *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, Faustus is the main character of the play.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching With Variety*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007), 64. The italics are located in the original text.

¹⁶ Ajanta Bhattacharyya, “Elements of Literature”, [Buzzle.com](http://www.buzzle.com/articles/elements-of-literature.html), 08/12/10, <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/elements-of-literature.html>, (Accessed August 14, 2010).

Having a discourse on the role of characters is critical in a paper focusing on using first person narrative sermons to preach to un-churched or marginalized women. Some may consider characterization as the skeleton of the narrative sermon especially in first person sermons. Arthurs explains characterization and the role of the characters as:

Character is the depiction of the persons in the story. It includes all of their physical, psychological, social, and spiritual attributes. The most important person in the story is the protagonist, a term that reminds us that plot and character cannot be separated: “protagonist” means literally the “primary struggler.” The plot spins on the axis of the main character. Narrative, like all art, universalizes particular experience. Characters carry a freight of meaning larger than themselves. By telling us the story of one man named Zacchaeus, who lived in Jericho, oversaw the collecting of taxes, climbed a tree to see Jesus (hardly the experience of the people we preach to) we learn the timeless truths about the kindness of God, the nature of repentance and the complete pardon of forgiveness... The art of characterization in ancient texts is much more succinct and reticent than the same art in modern texts.¹⁷

In preparation for an exegesis of Biblical women’s literature, it is necessary to discuss the term exegesis and its importance in embarking on that task. Engaging in Biblical exegesis of the passage is critical in preparing a first person narrative Big Idea sermon. In a paper where style and technique underlie literary, exposition, genre and other theological components of preparation let us discuss exegesis. Exegesis as defined by Dictionary.com is “critical explanation or interpretation of a text or portion of a text, especially of the Bible”¹⁸.

To further gain insight into the meaning and use of exegesis, Mark A. Johnson offers the following review of some of the great ‘Big Idea’ preachers.

If one is faithfully to exegete and to exposit a biblical passage in order to communicate the “big idea,” he or she must pay particular attention to the form of

¹⁷ Arthurs, *Preaching With Variety*, 72-73.

¹⁸ Exegesis, Dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/exegesis>, (Accessed August 26, 2010).

the biblical passage. Within each Testament, there are differing subsets of biblical forms in use. The realization that redactors have skillfully woven together many different sources in telling the biblical story, confirms the importance of "big idea" preaching. The model of the writers of the biblical text helps preachers see how differing strands can come together to communicate a single "big idea."¹⁹

Ruth 1 "Ruth, Naomi and Orpah"

In interpreting and relating the Book of Ruth to first person narrative sermons, it is important to discuss literature and the literary genres used in this book. The Bible uses various literary forms and is a compilation of various styles and genres of literature. Literature differs from other writing in significant ways.

In *Ruth*, imagery such as provision is embodied in Bethlehem: Bethlehem (בֵּיתְהָמֶם) literally means "house of bread." This is ironic since at the opening of the book, Bethlehem was lacking in bread due to the famine! In 1:6, God visits His people with the purpose of giving them bread. Ruth and Naomi together sojourn to Bethlehem hoping for, and finding, provision through Ruth's work of gleaning in the field, through Boaz's generous gift to Ruth, through Boaz's redemption of Ruth and Naomi's field, and finally through Obed, the son who holds the hope for future provision. The book begins with a famine but ends with plenty. It is also interesting to note that Ruth's marriage proposal occurs on the threshing floor, where the grain that provides is created. Not only does she return to Naomi after the marriage proposal with a promise of redemption but also with tangible evidence of grain. The use of the harvest cycle is also prevalent in Ruth. While the family tragedy is surrounded by famine, Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem when the famine has been abated at the beginning of the barley harvest, clueing the reader in to the hope they have.²⁰

The story of Ruth, Naomi and Orpah, clearly acknowledges Ruth, Naomi and Boaz are as the main characters. In narrative literature, the characters and their roles influence the plot, theme and setting of a story. Usually the main characters receive the focus of the narration. The writer of this thesis sometimes likes to veer off from the traditional and take up the side or the point of view of the lesser or minor characters.

¹⁹ Mark A. Johnson, "Big Idea of Biblical Preaching" Honors Work of Haddon Robinson, A Book Review, <http://www.preaching.com/book-reviews/11567372/>, 1 (Accessed August 26, 2010).

²⁰ Heather Goodman, "A Literary Analysis of the Book of Ruth", <http://bible.org/article/literary-analysis-book-ruth>, 1 (Accessed August 23, 2010).

The Reverend Charles Hoffacker makes the following statements about the significance of the main characters in this Biblical account found in the Book of Ruth. “This short story features three main characters: Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. As Eugene Peterson puts it, each of these characters demonstrates a way of ‘getting into the story’ that we know as the Book of Ruth. [Eugene H. Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* William B. Eerdmans, 1980, p. 98.] Thereby each character reminds us of a way that our own short story may possibly be linked with the grand drama of redemption.”²¹

It would be routine to preach about one of the main characters but any character in the Bible is worthy of exegesis and homily. That is true for Orpah as well. Theologians disagree about the life, importance and role of Orpah.

Orpah is one of the secondary characters of the Book of Ruth, which tells the reader only that she was Naomi’s second daughter-in-law. Like her sister-in-law Ruth, she initially wanted to accompany Naomi and return with her to her land; but, unlike Ruth, she finally accepted her mother-in-law’s arguments and went back to Moab. The Rabbinic expansion of this narrative, which relates both to Orpah’s actions and to her descendants, paints her in a generally unfavorable light.²²

Orpah in fact turns her back on Naomi and Ruth. One point for consideration is why did Orpah turn her back on her sister and her mother-in-law? Another critical examination is what happens to Orpah? Is there a lesson in her story? What happened to her?

²¹ Charles Hoffacker, “Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, and You”, 2006, *Lectionary.org*, <http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/Hoff/OT/Ruth%2001.01-19a,%20NaomiRuthBoaz.htm> (Accessed August 12, 2010).

²² Tamar Meir, “Orpah: Midrash and Aggadah.” *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 1 March 2009. Jewish Women’s Archive. <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/orpah-midrash-and-aggadah>> (Accessed August 22, 2010).

Exegesis of Ruth

Upon consideration of the book of Ruth, one must not overlook the book, which precedes Ruth. It is no coincidence or accident that the book of Judges precedes the book of Ruth. In that book a prophetess and judge was sent by God and that judge was a woman. At the close of that book, the Benjamites or men of Israel had to locate wives. They took women from Shiloh and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and settled in them (Judges 21:23). This scripture mentions Judah the home of Naomi.

In this story of Ruth, initially Naomi has moved to a foreign land. She loses her husband and her sons and remains with her two daughters-in-law. Naomi decides to return to her country of Judah with her daughters-in-law. As Naomi embarks on the journey to leave Moab, she decides to bid farewell to her daughters-in-law (Ruth 1:8). They said they would go back with her to her home Judah (Ruth 1:10). Naomi said that she had nothing to give to her daughters-in-law. She did not have any more sons or even if she had more they could not wait for them to reach manhood to marry them (Ruth 1:12-13). In chapter one, Ruth clings to Naomi and goes with her but Orpah turns back.

There is often significance in names and the names given to particular biblical people. It is wise to consider names and their importance in a first person narrative sermon. Thus a consideration of the names used in the story of Ruth is essential. The name “Ruth” translates as the following: “Ruth is an elusive term that keeps the reader guessing. What might Ruth mean? *Rivayah* – overflowing abundance, wet and fresh, satisfied and full? *Reut* – friendship? (Syriac Christian translation suggests *Reut*).”²³ The

²³ http://www.lookstein.org/resources/ruth_literary.pdf, Noam Zion, Megillat “RUTH: Hesed and Hutzpah” *A Literary Approach, Study Guide*, TICHON PROGRAM, SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE, JERUSALEM, summer 2005, 5765, 12, (Accessed August 22, 2010).

following statement reveals the translation of the name Orpah. “Ruth’s name means “friend”, a special kind of friend, a friend who sticks closer than a brother. The name, Orpah, on the other hand, means “the back of your neck” - the part that shows when you first turn away from someone. Boaz means ‘in him is strength’”.²⁴

The meaning of ‘Elimelech’, which was the Hebrew Jewish name of the husband Naomi lost, is “My God is King”. The names of her sons “Mahlon” and “Chillion” are also significant to the plot and outcome of the story. “Mahlon”, Ruth’s husband, means “weakling” and “Chillion”, Orpah’s husband, sometimes written Kilion means “sickly” or “pining”.²⁵ It may make one wonder, “who chose those names for those boys?” In Biblical literature names were important and relevant to a person’s station in life. For an additional example, in 2 Samuel 17 Hushai was given a name to recognize his merit.

However, Hushai informed David through the priests Zadok and Abiathar of the decision and bade him not to camp in Araboth in the desert but urged him to cross it. Since, then, he was on the right hand of David through his good advice, he obtained the name from his brave deed. Surely it is because of this that he is called “son of Jemini,” that is, “son of the right hand.” It is custom of Scripture not only to give those who are more wicked a name from their sin rather than from their fathers but also to call the better sons from the virtue characterizing them.²⁶

Let us discuss Orpah, who turned her back on her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. At least one Biblical scholar hypothesizes that Orpah did not have a smooth road or transition as she embarked on her solo journey. Although the Bible does not say exactly what happened to Orpah that night, the Bible states that Orpah is the mother of Goliath (2

²⁴ <http://www.ruthinternational.org/sowhatdoesitallmean.htm>, Ruth International Inc. © 2006 (Accessed August 31, 2010).

²⁵ <http://www.ruthinternational.org/sowhatdoesitallmean.htm>, Ruth International Inc. © 2006 (Accessed August 31, 2010).

²⁶ John R. Franke, Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Old Testament IV, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel*, Vol. 4, (Downers Grove, IL: 2000), 380.

Samuel 21). This narrative reinforces the necessity of addressing a minor character with whom a contemporary woman can relate.

In addition to the importance of the characters' names in this story, it is pertinent that scene is set by shedding light on the setting and the geographical composition of the land and how that impacted the situation for Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah. They were living in Moab and left there to return to Naomi's home of Bethlehem Judah. Here is some further pertinent information about the land.

RUTH 1:2 ...his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. RTH 1:4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. a) The Moabites were the descendants of Lot by his eldest daughter (GEN 19:30-38). GEN 19:36, 37 "So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today." b) The land they occupied was mostly on a plateau east of the Dead Sea, about 4,300 feet above the level of the Dead Sea. c) The land was used for viticulture (grapevines), agriculture, and the grazing of flocks and herds, particularly, sheep.²⁷

One of the significances of this discussion of the land is the conflicts that Ruth and Naomi may have faced on their journey to Judah and Orpah's journey back to Moab. It also gives background information regarding the lineage of the Moabites.

Exegesis of Esther 4:1-17

In this scripture, there is the theme of women's appearance, demeanor and beauty, and obedience to a husband and authority. These themes may not be the primary themes of the story but they do cause the removal and the 'divorce' of Vashti and the crowning of Esther as the new queen. Without alluding to the beauty of both of these women, it

²⁷ Kathryn Capoccia, *Women of the Bible – Ruth, A Woman of Devoted Love*, Young Adults Sunday School Class, 2000. <http://www.biblebb.com/files/KSS/kss-ruth.htm>, (Accessed September 1, 2010).

might be difficult to see some of the intricacies involved in the losing of one queen and the selection of another. For contemporary women beauty (appearance) is still a determining factor in how society and self view, portray and treat them.

As the story opens, the King has summoned the Queen, Vashti, to come to his party with her ladies in waiting and amuse his men and him. She ignores his request. The other men convince the king he cannot allow that behavior to happen in the future. They contend that women will think they have the right to refuse the king or any husband's request. The reading of this biblical account, appalled the thesis writer because of the manner in which women were seen as property and something to be put on display. The king could have killed Queen Vashti for her refusal. We do know however, that Esther replaced her as queen. Again, the king called women in so he could make his decision for Vashti's replacement. It did turn out that a woman who would be instrumental to the Jewish people being given their rights became the new queen but women may need to see that having the guts to take a stand for what they believe is important.

As one exegetes the Book of Esther and attempts to study its narrative qualities, it is important to discuss the varying scholars' opinions as to whether it is a historical fiction, a biblical narrative or merely a fictitious story. The thesis writer believes that the following statements shed some light on the validity of this biblical story.

Indeed some scholars maintain that Esther is not meant to reflect any historical event that happened at a specific time; rather, it is a fictional story. Scholars who regard the book of Esther as a work of historical fiction propose a milder formulation—that is, the main plot contains a kernel of genuine historical truth. Indeed, during Ahasuerus' time, a decree was passed to annihilate the Jews, and this decree was rescinded in the wake of Esther's intervention.²⁸

²⁸ Jonathan Grossman, *Esther The Outer Narrative and the hidden Reading*, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns Pub., 2011), 17.

There are interesting and important characters in the book of Esther. One of the primary characters is King Xerxes or Ahasuerus.

This is what happened in the days of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present (Esther 1:1-2).

Another character important to the story is Queen Vashti. “Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes” (Esther 1:9). Then another character of interest is a Godly man named Mordecai. He is Esther’s uncle who raised her after her parents died.

Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died (Esther 2: 55-7).

One of the themes addressed in the sermons used in the projects in this thesis is that of an orphan overcoming difficulty and succeeding. An orphan resolving conflict is a premise in the Esther sermon crafted for this thesis project. Esther, the biblical character has achieved that goal.

The book of Esther is many things, so many, in fact, that it would be a capital mistake to view it from only one angle. It is, for example, a tale of intrigue at court, a story of lethal danger to the Jews narrowly averted by the heroic rescue. It is also a tale of the ascent of an orphan in exile to the rank of the most powerful woman---and perhaps even the most powerful person---in the empire and arguably, the world. The book of Esther is the story of how a humiliated and endangered minority, the Jews of the eastern Diaspora after the Babylonian exile, came to be respected and feared by the Gentile majority and to see one of their own honored by appointment to the second highest post in the empire. It is the comical story of a pompous fool who does himself in and the chilling tale of the narrow escape from death of a despised and ever-vulnerable minority. It is all

these things and more, and readers who are satisfied that they know what Esther means would be well advised to examine it again in search of other dimensions.²⁹

When completing a biblical exegesis of the book of Esther, it is essential to address a theme of bringing together people of various cultures and religious backgrounds. In the story of Esther as well as the story of Ruth and the Samaritan woman, the coming together of people of various cultures is evident.

Excitement of Preaching the New Testament in First Person Narrative

Luke 10: 38-42 "At the Home of Mary and Martha"

The Bible attributes Luke with the writing of the book of Luke. Luke is one of the disciples who traveled with Paul and other disciples after Jesus' death. The book of Luke is the third book of the four Gospels in the New Testament. A consensus of Biblical scholars agrees that Luke was a physician. "Ancient testimony is unanimous that Luke ('the beloved Physician' Col. 4:14) penned the third Gospel."³⁰ The Gospel according to Luke traces the birth and the stories of John the Baptist and Jesus. It speaks of how John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus and then Jesus' public ministry. This Gospel places a great deal of emphasis on Jesus' ministry in Galilee.

As in introduction to the book of Luke in the Women's Devotional Bible, writes: "Luke wants this gospel to present Jesus as a Savior for the whole human race. The stories emphasize how kind and loving Jesus is to those despised by society (such as tax collectors, Samaritans, the poor and women)." ³¹ There are many instances in the book of Luke where it is shown that the plight and needs of the marginalized and women are addressed. This thesis exposes a few of them.

²⁹ Levenson, *Esther A Commentary*, 1.

³⁰ The King James Study Bible, Liberty University, 1988, 1530.

³¹ Women's Devotional Bible, NIV, Zondervan, 1990.

In the beginning of the book of Luke it presents, a marginalized couple. Elizabeth and Zechariah were a married couple well along in years and childless. She was barren, past childbearing age and they both had wanted children. An angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah and told him that his prayer had been answered; Elizabeth and he would have a child. Not only would they have a son but also he would be a joy to them and filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth (Luke 1:5-7, 11-14). In this same chapter, the angel appears to the Virgin Mary and tells her that she too will give birth. She was betrothed to be married to Joseph (Luke 1:26-34). The book of Luke highlights the needs of the marginalized and women right from the beginning. Thus, right from the beginning of the book of Luke mentions barrenness or infertility, and unwed pregnancy. These challenges are some that contemporary marginalized females face as well.

As Luke continues, Jesus exhibits his concern for the marginalized through the many acts he does. He drives out an evil spirit from a man possessed by a demon (Luke 4:31-35). After that Jesus attends to Simon's mother who was suffering from a high fever and heals many others suffering from all kinds of sicknesses (Luke 4:38-41). Then he calls the first disciples and one was a self-admitted sinful man (Luke 5:8-11). Jesus then healed a leper and a paralytic. After that Jesus calls a Levi, a tax collector, to be one of his disciples (Luke 5:12-15, 17-32). Throughout the book of Luke, one can read about the myriad of ways Jesus ministers to the marginalized and women. Jesus not only attends to the physically sick and marginalized but those who are spiritually diseased and marginalized as well.

Some biblical scholars have theorized that the Mary in Luke chapter ten is the same sister of Martha mentioned in the book of John chapter 11 verses 1-3 when she

anointed Jesus' head with the very expensive perfumed ointment much to the chagrin of some of Jesus' other followers. Thus if this is the same Mary, the following may be significant. This dinner may be another time when some present criticize Mary for ministering to Jesus. In the Gospel according to John verses 12:1-11, gives Mary credit again for anointing Jesus. She pours the oil on Jesus' feet and wipes his feet with her hair. Martha continues to prepare and serve the meal and Judas Iscariot who would later betray Jesus verbally attacks Mary by. Then the book of Luke speaks of how Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. That is how and when the Bible introduces the home of Martha and Mary in the book of Luke.

In considering this particular story of Jesus, Mary, and Martha, it is obvious that Jesus is speaking not only to Mary and Martha but also to all women. In an exegetical examination of this scripture, one analyzes that there is a message for women that one must spend time with Jesus. Some women can become so busy with the activities and preparation of church or ministry that they neglect to spend time at the feet of Jesus. It was a critical time for Jesus but Mary appeared to have understood the needed part.

Before arriving at Martha and Mary's house, Jesus spoke with a lawyer who stood up to test Jesus (Luke 10:25). That scripture is usually entitled the "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" (Women's Devotional Bible, p. 1118, NIV). That is the scripture when Jesus explains to this lawyer as well as other readers and hearers of his Word that it is crucial to love God and your neighbor (Luke 10:27-28). He also told this lawyer through one of the many parables he told that it is necessary to do good for your neighbor. Thus when discussing the next scripture with Mary and Martha, Jesus is not telling Mary, Martha or the twenty-first century reader not to do for others.

Sometimes career or jobs get in women's way of spending time with the Lord. This can make some women marginalized. Mary sat at Jesus' feet, as it appears that she was used to doing whenever he came to town. Martha proceeded with the preparations of the dinner. She also was bold enough to inquire as to whether Jesus cared that Mary had left her to do all the work by herself (Luke 10:40). Then she had the audacity to proceed to tell Jesus to tell Mary to help her (Luke 10:40).

Readers of the Bible may wonder why this story of Martha and Mary was even included in the Bible. One explanation may be that women were there with Jesus and this woman, Mary was able to discern what Jesus needed when his disciples could not. In each of these depictions of Jesus with Mary and Martha of Bethany, Jesus had to tell people that they should be allow Mary to minister to him.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived in Bethany and Jesus had visited them in the past (John 11:1-3). In fact, Jesus loved these sisters and their brother (John 11:5). When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick he did not go right away to attend to his friend (John 11:6). Jesus knew Lazarus was dead and he also knew that everyone, including the disciples, needed to learn a lesson especially in their ability to have belief through the situation of Lazarus' death in John 11:9-15.

John 4:3-42 Exegesis of "The Samaritan Woman"

When engaging in a discourse about preaching to un-churched and marginalized women, one cannot omit the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well. Her story is one that not only gives credence to the importance of reaching un-churched and marginalized women, but Jesus also models how to do it. Jesus did not forget about this woman. He approached her at the well although the custom and law at the time would not

have allowed Jesus to approach this woman. How can one build God's Kingdom here on earth if one does not go to where the un-churched and marginalized are and then speak to them? Theologically and socially speaking there is so much in this scripture that emphasizes the importance of reaching people where they are without being condescending or negative to them regardless of their differences or sins.

According to Matthew Henry's Commentary in John verses 4-26, "there was great hatred between the Samaritans and the Jews. Christ's road from Judea to Galilee lay through Samaria."³² This hatred between the Samaritans and the Jews stemmed from years of theological differences and discord. In the Bible, there is mention of the enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. The book of John verses 4:9 mentions hatred and problems between the two groups.

However, Jesus could have chosen anyone to be the character of the good neighbor in his parable. But He didn't. He chose a Samaritan. He reached to the very bottom of the barrel in the Jewish way of thinking. He chose the most despised to make the point that God is not impressed by what race you were born to or who your parents are. As the Sovereign of the universe, He is less than impressed by your position or status, secular or religious. And it must be downright humorous to the angels looking down from the splendor of heaven to hear human beings talking about the rich and the famous of this world. God is impressed when He sees His own character demonstrated in the life of one of His creatures.³³

³² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-concise/john/4.html>, (Accessed August 15, 2010).

³³ David C. Carson, "Who were the Samaritans?", <http://davcarson.home.mindspring.com/Intertestamental/samaritan.htm>, 2006 (Accessed August 15, 2010).

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John'—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. Therefore, he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. (John 4: 1-6 NRS)

Jesus uses this situation with this Samaritan woman to minister to her, thus enabling her to minister to others. Not only was she a Samaritan but she was a woman. Jesus was alone with this woman at the well. He first asked her to help him. She questioned why he would request anything from her since they were enemies, due to her being a Samaritan and his being a Jew.

Jesus had just departed from being with the disciples and John the Baptist in ministry. The abovementioned verses tell that Jesus had to go through Samaria. This could indicate a planned trip there to visit with someone. Preaching may involve a planned trip to the unknown, unsanctioned and or even forbidden place with unfamiliar and un-churched or marginalized women. Jesus went through Samaria.

When this scripture is studied, it highlights the part about it occurring at noon. Sometimes one might have to go out at a time that is out of the ordinary to reach unordinary women. This woman assumed that she might be alone or with other women like herself who because of their transgressions are unable to come to the well with the other women early in the morning.

All the women of the town always came to the well in the early morning to get their water. The day was cooler and, besides, all the other women were there and they had a good chance to visit and talk to one another. The only women, who didn't go in the morning, were the women that were considered sinful or dirty. "This woman that Jesus met was one of the sinful, dirty women. Because of her

sinful life, she wasn't allowed to get water when all the other women came to the well. She had to wait until no one else was around.³⁴

After engaging in research and exegesis of these Biblical women, the writer of this thesis is convinced that these are Biblical women worthy of creating sermons about to preach to marginalized or un-churched females of the twenty-first century. The plan is that by hearing these sermons and being engaged these women will turn their lives around, if that is necessitated and grow closer to a God who saves, liberates and loves.

The preaching of first person narrative sermons to un-churched or marginalized females is an authentic way for these females to see that some of the problems they encounter are not original or just theirs. Biblical women and girls faced some of the same challenges. As they hear the sermon about Esther and Vashti, they will see that these two women had issues involving their appearance. The thesis will also reveal how people judged, viewed or treated them because of their appearance. Hearing about the Ruth, Naomi and Orpah narrative, the struggles these women faced and how they got through and overcame them can be liberating for contemporary women.

Hearing about the woman at the well and how a man told her everything she had ever done, but did not judge her or hold it against her is encouraging. Hearing about how Mary and Martha entertained Jesus and how he spoke with them and engaged them pedagogically will assist contemporary women in seeing how Jesus can teach women today through the Bible and prayer. One of the goals of the thesis project is assist women

³⁴ Brian Carlisle, "The Woman at the Well, A Story About the Woman of Samaria", The Children's Chapel, 2006 - The Lorain County Free-Net Chapel, North Central Ohio, U.S.A., <http://www.childrenschapel.org/biblestories/text/womanatthewell.txt>, (Accessed August 12, 2010).

in seeing that after Jesus comes into their lives and they decide to follow him and seek salvation, their stories are important and can be a testimony to other women.

It is essential for women to hear in sermons about a God who will protect and watch over them when widowed or step out into a “foreign land”. There is necessity of a God who can take them from slave to Queen, who can tell them everything they have ever done, and who will rebuke them in love when they just do not get it right. Thus, they will become familiar with a God who is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent and desire to follow him because of a woman’s testimony and begin to believe in him.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGIANS SPEAK OF FIRST PERSON NARRATIVES FOR FEMALES

He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

--Esther 4:8

The main emphasis of this chapter is first to highlight literature that addresses the importance of preaching the Gospel to un-churched and/or marginalized women. Three areas being examined in this literature review are preaching to marginalized women and other marginalized people, preaching from the African American experience and its relationship to female preachers and their roles and preaching first person narrative sermons. Although there have been significant texts on at least two of the three above-mentioned areas, as much significant information as possible is included about African American preaching as it relates to the theme of marginalized women.

This chapter reveals the importance of preaching the Gospel with authority and vigor. As stated in the Bible, go out and preach in season and out of season. "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2 NIV). It is crucial that the preacher receives preparation and becomes equipped to preach. *Evangelism for a Changing World* addresses this by discussing what happened to the disciples after Jesus' death and particularly to Peter:

In the ten-day interval following the Ascension, the disciples waited on and received the promise of the Father. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter was baptized with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit immersed him into the body of Christ. He was indwelt by the Holy Spirit, like every other believer in this dispensation. He was sealed with the Holy Spirit. He was filled and anointed by the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, Petrel received power (dynamis) that would enable him to accomplish

God's will and to proclaim the gospel. He was marvelously transformed by God the Holy Spirit. Something new was added to Peter's spiritual life. He had been transformed from a coward to a champion for Jesus Christ. Peter, the transformed fisherman, stood up and in the power of the Holy Spirit boldly proclaimed the word of God.¹

That is what God desires that one who had been a leader, then fell, became a coward and even a liar can receive salvation and preach the word of God such as Peter did. Then God can transform and use that same individual to help in the transformation of others. For example in the case of biblical women such as the Samaritan woman who Jesus encountered by the well one can have problematic beginnings but turn their lives around. The woman at the well lived a questionable life. Her peers and other women in the community probably shunned and ridiculed her, but Jesus accepted her. She was involved in five marriages and lived with at least one man who was not her husband. Females require a God who can tell women everything they have ever done and still love them unconditionally with agape love.

Evangelism for a Changing World is not a preaching manual or homiletic review. Its primary focus is as follows and as Alvin Reid states so eloquently to perform these tasks.

The essays in this book are divided into four main sections. Dr. Fish has always encouraged his student to be creative and seek new approaches to ministry. Hence, section one has this focus. Section two highlights Fish's emphasis on the evangelistic imperative. The third section acknowledges Fish's interest and emphasis on the significant role of spiritual awakening in evangelism. It is our prayer that these writings will not only educate you and inspire you, but also motivate you to share the good news of Jesus Christ with a world of lost and dying people.²

¹ Robert Coleman, O.S. Hawkins, Calvin Miller, Darrell Robinson, Rick Warren, Timothy Beougher, Alvin Reid, *Evangelism for a Changing World*, (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1995), 129.

² Coleman, et al. *Evangelism for a Changing World*, Introduction.

What gives preachers the authority to preach and proclaim the Gospel to a sin sick world? Originally, God gives preachers the authority to preach and proclaim the Gospel to a sin sick world. The Old and New Testament, reiterates this many times that the people of God must spread the Good News and build the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.

The thesis writer struggled with using first person narrative preaching because congregants and preachers in black churches seem to long for three points and a poem. Veer off and you may receive comments such as, “that was different”, or “I have never heard that kind of sermon before”. When the thesis writer first learned to use this style of preaching, she generally dramatized the scripture and then preached a more traditional sermon to augment it unless the preaching occurred at a women’s fellowship or Bible study.

Preaching as It Relates to Women

There is an important reason to preach to women about women’s issues. The Bible contains stories that are for and about women. The preaching text, *The Soul of the Black Preacher* used in the African Methodist Episcopal Church Institute is one book that gives instruction and insight into preaching in the African American church. This author printed this book in 1971. It appears to feature the three points and a poem or song as a model still. It may be effective in giving a historical background but requires augmentation in current preaching styles and sermons. Additional texts on homiletics are needed to augment the historical texts and assist people in using the available contemporary resources to preach to the twenty-first century un-churched or marginalized woman.

There is death among Americans as far as Christian life and lifestyle and it warrants a new birth. According to Barna,

The unchurched population varies from year to year, but it generally encompasses about one-third of the adult population and slightly less among young people. In mid-2000, we at Barna Research estimated that about 95 to 100 million Americans of all ages were unchurched. If all the unchurched people in the United States were a nation of their own, they would be the eleventh most populated country on Earth. Clearly, the religious nature of America has not affected the life of every person in the same way. And for nearly 100 million of our fellow citizens, the Church is not part of their lives. For those of us who are outreach oriented—and that should include all who call Jesus their savior—reaching the unchurched with both the good news of the grace extended to them by Jesus and the benefit of being part of His Church is one of the greatest challenges we face in this life.³

The Bible even told the prophet Ezekiel to wake up those dry bones. We need homilies that reach people where they are, wake them up and set their feet on higher ground. If something is not working, give it up. If a three points and a poem or song sermon does not seem to be heard and heeded by the current congregation or the new attendees, something else is needed. There is a saying, if you do what you always done, you will get what you always got. Women are hungry for and needing the Bible but they do not want to be in an environment that is old fashioned, unbending or unrealistic.

On October 26, 2010, the thesis writer attended a worship service at the World Trade Center in Boston, MA. Bishop T. D. Jakes preached a sermon entitled, “What to do When Church Doesn’t Work”. Bishop Jakes reinforced what this writer already believes about preaching. He said, “The people in need of Christ today aren’t coming out to the churches to hear a sermon with three points and a poem. Parents in need of help with a child with AIDS do not want or need to hear those kinds of sermons. Mothers trying to

³ Barna, *Grow Your Church From The Outside In*, 22-23.

raise children today need help with feeding them and supporting them.”⁴

Bishop Jakes said, “It is easy to think that those people are having a problem and be exclusionary in our thinking. He said we are running out of time. So whatever we are going to do in life we have to go ahead and do and we have to be radical.”

We have to stop worrying about criticism and what people will say. We don’t have time to worry about what people will think. That is why it is imperative that we do what we were called to do right now. One in six boys and one in three girls are molested between the age of five and fifteen. We are tired of visiting our nieces and nephews in prisons. We are tired of our daughters being pregnant at fifteen. We can not fight today’s battles with the weapons that our grandparents used. It is a different time. We can not duplicate the methodology of our fathers and grandparents. We need to challenge ourselves to go beyond business as usual.⁵

Preaching to the marginalized especially women is an important and essential task. Alice Matthews is one theologian who understands that well and has made a great and profound contribution toward that endeavor. Not only is she a theologian, a seminary dean, a professor, and a conference speaker but she is also a woman. *Preaching That Speaks to Women* is the title of one of her books and it is a title that would have been appropriate for this thesis had it not already been taken. Matthews’ book addresses ways to preach to women. Haddon Robinson writes the following about her in the foreword to the abovementioned book.

Alice Mathews is qualified to write about women and how to communicate to them. She knows the territory. She has earned a Ph.D. in women’s studies, but she does not suffer from a celibacy of the intellect. She has exercised her gifts as a pastor’s wife, a missionary, a seminary dean, an author, a teacher, a conference speaker, and an office worker. She has also served her time as a listener in the pew. She writes about women as listeners because she knows them, and those who know her know she loves and values them. Reading what she has written will help you address effectively both halves of the human race.⁶

⁴ Bishop T.D. Jakes, sermon on Oct. 26, 2010, 7PM, World Trade Center, Boston, MA.

⁵ Jakes, sermon on Oct. 26, 2010, 7PM, World Trade Center, Boston, MA.

⁶ Matthews, *Preaching That Speaks to Women*, Haddon Robinson, Foreword, 8.

Effective preaching to women is a goal toward all preachers should strive. Men can preach to women just as women can however women have been somewhat deterred from doing so. Ella Pearson Mitchell relays this incident in *Those Preaching Women*:

Many years ago I helped direct a doctoral program with summer seminars, one of which was held in Atlanta. One day it dawned on us that not a single woman from the faculty or from among the student wives had had a single word to say in morning chapel. The mere mention of this won us the assignment to plan and lead a service celebrating God's gifts to women.⁷

People such as Ella Mitchell highlight the necessity for preaching to women and women being able to do that. Mitchell has written *Those Preaching Women Volumes I-III, Unto All Generations, The Church Looks at the Rights of Children*, and has contributed to various church-related publications.

Discourse on Church Attendance Especially of Females

Although this paper primarily focuses on reaching women, the female gender in total including small girls, teenagers, and young adults as well as older women including widows and females in nursing care centers, men will hear the sermons as well. Using first person sermons should allow females to fully internalize and relate to the preached Word. First person sermons engage individuals in a way that three points and a poem just might not. The people hearing the sermons were male and female. Although women comprise a large percentage of the attendees of churches, today many sermon illustrations do not acknowledge them accordingly. Women being the largest attendees in the congregations were especially the case in the settings in which the writer preached the sermons used in this thesis. Statistics show that women are attending in numbers that

⁷ Ella Pearson Mitchell, ed., *Those Preaching Women Vol. 2*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1989), 14-15.

outweigh men by a considerable margin depending upon the various communities, denominations and churches.

“The numbers of “unchurched” people have increased rapidly in the U.S. These are individuals who have not attended church in recent months.”⁸

The biggest gap is between the oldest and youngest age groups. Sixty percent of people age 65 and older report attending religious services at least once a week; among 18 to 30-year-olds, just 28 percent go that often. Previous ABCNEWS polls, similarly, have found that religious belief and practice increase with age.⁹

There is also the situation of who actually attend church. The consulted writers agree that women go to church in larger numbers than men do. Women in the Southern areas of the United States attend more regularly than women in the North. “There are other factors. Nearly half of Southerners attend services weekly, substantially more than elsewhere. Forty-four percent of women go weekly, compared to 32 percent of men. It follows that, among Southern women age 45 and up, weekly church attendance soars to 68 percent.”¹⁰

An article found in Times Daily.com, noted that church attendance is higher in the South than in the North. When polled, Americans stated that they do attend church and of those polled 42% said they attend church regularly. Massachusetts fell in the bottom ten of the states polled in the United States in regards to church attendance. When the researchers considered the bottom ten states for church attendance Massachusetts came in fourth of the states with the lowest church attendance. However when queried about

⁸ “Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance”, 2006-OCT-18, B.A. Robinson, http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_tren.htm, (Accessed November 5, 2010).

⁹ *Who Goes to Church? Older Southern Women Do; Many Catholic Men Don't*, Analysis by Dalia Sussman, http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/dailynews/church_poll020301.html, Feb. 19-20, Horsham, Pa. (Accessed November 6, 2010).

¹⁰ Dalia Sussman, *Who Goes to Church? Older Southern Women Do; Many Catholic Men Don't*, (Accessed November 6, 2010).

habits of church attendance, here is what Eubanks, a staff writer for the Times Daily ascertained: “A look inside almost any church on Easter Sunday might reveal pews filled with parishioners, heads bowed in prayer or voices raised in song.”¹¹ This is the image exhibited on Easter Sunday and when asked about their personal church attendance, people corroborated that image. “It’s an image that would be in keeping with 2009 Gallup Poll data about Americans and church attendance. The survey reveals 42 percent of Americans attend church weekly or almost weekly.”¹² The South has a higher church attendance than the North so needs to do work to get the un-churched or marginalized women into the pews in New England. The Eubanks article states: “Mississippi and Alabama lead the nation, with 63 percent and 58 percent of their respective populations attending services almost every week.”¹³

It is important to include information and statistics about age and gender in the assessment and a thesis on preaching to un-churched or marginalized females. Preaching to reach children is important because women of childbearing age and parents should be an integral component of one’s congregation. If the children come then the parents will come too. If parents are inclined to go to church, they most likely will bring their children along. Having services that attract and sustain the child and youth population is important to church growth. Having preaching that complements the other church programs is necessary.

It is possible that demographics could be affecting church attendance. Gallup analysis documents that Americans in their 60s, 70s, and 80s are significantly more likely to attend church than those who are younger. The

¹¹ Michelle Rupe Eubanks, “Poll: South Leads in Church Attendance”, Saturday, April 3, 2010 <http://www.timesdaily.com/article/20100404/articles/4045030>, (Accessed November 13, 2010).

¹² Eubanks, “Poll: South Leads in Church Attendance”, (Accessed November 13, 2010).

¹³ Eubanks, “Poll: South Leads in Church Attendance”, (Accessed November 13, 2010).

oldest of the large group of baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are now entering their 60s. Thus, with each advancing year, more and more baby boomers enter the age range that traditionally has been associated with higher religious service participation. If baby boomers do in fact attend church more frequently as they age, it follows that church attendance would increase steadily in the years ahead.¹⁴

Challenges Facing Contemporary Women

When one considers the importance of preaching to un-churched and marginalized women, it is important to discuss the necessity for preaching about the struggles, trials and problems that women encounter and must overcome. One cannot overlook the importance of dealing with the issues facing contemporary women. *The Soul of the Black Preacher* highlights that it is of importance to attend to the basic needs of the listeners.

Freedom and liberation run through the Black spirituals and through the sermons and expositions of the early Black preacher. He was a fighter for freedom and permitted himself to be used as the instrument for the new forces of liberation which were being manifested in the world. He was the living organ through which the desires, hopes and aspirations of his people were expressed. Armed with the word of God and his physical body, the early black preacher attacked the bastions of injustice, inhumanity, cruelty, and oppression. With the word of God he proclaimed the coming of a brighter day when his black brothers and sisters would be free and free indeed. He challenged the power structures of his day and he carried a message of hope and faith, knowing and believing that eventually the will of God would be done on earth as it is in heaven.¹⁵

One criticism of this book and its message is that it is delineates the preacher solely in the male gender. Yes, the author wrote this book in the 1970's but as literature included on a denomination's contemporary reading list for student preachers; it does not

¹⁴ Frank Newport, "Americans' Church Attendance Inches Up in 2010", *Increase Accompanies Rise in Economic Confidence*, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/>, (Accessed November 13, 2010).

¹⁵ Bishop Joseph J. Johnson, *The Soul of the Black Preacher*, (Chapel Hill, NC: United Church Press, 1971), 116.

give voice to the oppressed female preacher. Although as this chapter deals with the voice of the oppressed and mentions not only oppressed men but women as well.

One of the sources consulted for this thesis is *Preaching that Speaks to Women* by Alice Matthews. A book such as this was long overdue. This book published in 2003 addresses the importance of preaching and reaching women by considering the differences between the genders. Biblical scholars like Alice Mathews address the dichotomy of preaching to women and preaching to men.

In 1929 Virginia Wolfe wrote, “It is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex. It is the masculine values that prevail.” Therein lies a problem that can be particularly acute for Christian women. In much preaching, the “masculine value” of rules and principles prevails over relationships. Yet if Miller is correct that women’s sense of self is organized around their ability to make and maintain relationships, that affiliation cannot.¹⁶

When preaching to women the preacher should take into consideration that

women think differently about life and its situations than men do. “Men think and women feel”, it has been said. As a note found on the internet at preaching.org states, Matthews’ book and research are relevant to all preachers attempting to reach women.

Most pastors speak to more women (sic) than men every Sunday. This is a fact. If the differences between men and women are as profound as Alice Matthews suggests, male preachers need to pay attention. This is not a book for women preachers. This is a book for male preachers who are trying to understand how to speak to the women who come to them to listen.

Of course truth is truth, no matter who preaches it. Still, when the preacher breaks out yet another football illustration, some of the women in the crowd might justifiably roll their eyes. The issues are more profound, however, than this. Matthews deals with an array of issues including epistemology, postmodernity, spirituality, power, leadership, and identity. The challenge, according to Matthews, is to locate authority in the Word of God, but to communicate that Word in ways that are sensitive to the

¹⁶ Matthews, *Preaching That Speaks to Women*, 38.

ways of knowing experienced by men and women. This book is worth considering.¹⁷

A book review of, *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, points out that:

‘Men and women are very different in the ways they think, respond and behave.

Understanding these differences helps relationships. ‘We mistakenly assume that if our partners love us they will react and behave in [the way] we react and behave when we love someone.’¹⁸

As is stated in Matthew’s book it is important that women are recognized and acknowledged in their varying roles especially within the church. She states,

This chapter is about helping women love others as they love themselves, especially those who are different from themselves. Preachers must preach in such a way that all women are valued and seen as worthy of love and acceptance regardless of the particular roles they do or do not have. To love others, women must also see others. Preachers must preach in such a way that all women are visible in the life of the church.¹⁹

The writer of this thesis contends that women comprise a large percentage of church attendees today. Women need to hear the preached Word as well as men. Women may want to not only sit in the pews but have the desire to preach too. The Bible has to be relevant to females so girls too can see other women preach and realize that God can call them to preach too. There are still women in our churches despite all the gains women have made in secular goals, feel women God has not called to preach in church.

¹⁷ http://www.preaching.org/reviews/display_review/41, *Preaching that Speaks to Women*, Alice P. Matthews, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), (Accessed November 16, 2010).

¹⁸ John Gray Ph.D., *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* Notes -. Posted Tue, 09/06/05, “Men and Women are Hard Wired Differently and respond differently”, http://relationships.blogcity.com/men_are_from_mars_women_are_from_venus_notes_john_gray_phd.htm, (Accessed November 15, 2010).

¹⁹ Matthews, *Preaching That Speaks to Women*, 144.

Today, we of that oppressed body known as women, the female of the species, still believe that God has prophesied our liberation; God has declared what he will do *in* us and *with* us, and we know that liberation will come to pass. It may be evidenced by a number of ways, but it will come. I would hate to see it come to pass by a mass revolution, and I don't suspect it ever will. Although we women are in the numerical and financial majority in our churches, a great many of us, like some of the slaves, love our chains and shackles too well to change.²⁰

Preaching From the African America Perspective

I am a black preacher. I too, am a woman preacher. Preaching as an African American and a woman are some challenges I face as a Christian. I had been quiet and soft spoken for most of my life. I had not dreamed that I could or would hoop, scream or even raise my voice and albeit I still cannot on my own volition. God has to call; I have to answer that call, get up there, forget about myself, and concentrate on him when I preach. Upon hearing the call to preach, I wondered if God was sure. Now that I am preaching and every time I get up to do so, I still have this nervousness in the pit of my stomach but through his call and empowerment, I do what thus saith the Lord. Black preaching has evolved and withstood the test of time so to speak. The fire and brimstone sermons, which frightened some children and adults alike, have metamorphosed. African American homilies have come a long way and some of us are incorporating contemporary styles of others into our sermons.

Black preaching is conditioned by the sociology, economics, government, culture--the total ethos----of the ghetto. It is also affected by (and producing and changing) both a Black summa theologia and, in particular, a theology about itself. Much of this body of thought is unconscious and unformulated, but the process of analysis and writing has begun. Professor James H. Cone's writings are especially good cases in point. It is necessary and appropriate here to consider the

²⁰ Ella Pearson Mitchell, ed., *Those Preachin' Women*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1990), 19-20

theology of black preaching. This can only be a beginning, but it is very important to state this theological basis.²¹

The black preacher's soul also grew and developed. He exerted and lost himself in acts of service of love and devotion to members of the black witnessing community, visiting those who were cast into prison, bringing words of comfort to those who mourn. He won his soul through the sermons he preached, the hymns he sang, the reading of the Scriptures and the prayers he prayed.²²

There are differences in people such as racial, gender, economic, religious and cultural. However, Americans uphold the equality of all people. Through the years, the differences in race and culture have led people to experience the same events in different ways. Preaching is no different. People become used to a certain way of receiving and reacting to a homiletic message and that stays with them. The preacher can go before the African American congregation and give them what they are accustomed to or they can give them what the situation necessitated. "His gospel requires us to treat all kinds of people with love, dignity and respect precisely because they are made in the image of God and potentially include those he considered so precious that he sacrificed his Son to make them our spiritual siblings" (Rom 8:32; Eph. 2:12-19).

Preaching from the African American experience involves a dichotomy. The dichotomy seems to branch from preaching that is considered from the Holy Spirit evolving from the history of slavery and then the Reconstruction Era versus a written sermon. During those periods in American history, most African Americans were unable to read and write. Thus, African American preachers for the most part did not use a written text when they preached. Some could not read others were not able to show that

²¹ Gayraud S. Wilmore, ed., *African American Religious Studies*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 361.

²² Johnson Jr., *The Soul of the Black Preacher*, 3-4.

they had that ability. Still today, there are preachers who have considered first person narrative sermons as not sanctioned or led by the Holy Spirit. Mitchell says,

The first comment has to be that God can speak to a man at his desk as well as the pulpit. Therefore, although the end product is a dialogue with the congregation, the beginning may well be in a dialogue between the preacher and his God. This can produce both manuscripts and outlines. The old-school idea that only man speaks on prepared paper was usually a dodge to rationalize the unlearned preachers' nonconcern with books and writing. That the very Bible itself was *written* by men inspired did not seem to trouble the anti-book people.²³

In the chapter by Henry H. Mitchell, in the book *African American Religious Studies*, it is pointed out that first African American sermons arrive from a black theology, then there is the belief that the Holy Spirit must be included, and ultimately that the sermon must come from God. There is at least one dichotomy in the crafting and delivery of black sermons. There is the traditional mode of thinking and presenting a sermon as God the speaker in a black sermon. In an effort to facilitate an adjustment in terms of sermon preparation and delivery within the African American experience, Mitchell sheds light on a potential paradigm shift.

This requires a collateral assumption about preparation which would appear to some as not typically black. Men must prepare to preach. Many Black preachers seriously hold that specific preparation is contrary to the concept that sermons come from God. But other Black preachers (certainly those who bother to get professional training) hold that God acts only after man has done all that he can by way of preparation. The category "man," in this case, includes the congregation. In unwitting support of the concept of man's critical participation, many of the preachers most committed to Black culture will say, when the sermon goes hard, "Somebody isn't praying!" Thus the often unconscious assumption of Black preaching is that man brings God his very best and asks him to take both preacher and congregation and make between them a sermon experience in which his word and will are proclaimed with *power*.²⁴

²³ Gayraud S. Wilmore, ed., *African American Religious Studies*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 363.

²⁴ Wilmore, ed., *African American Religious Studies*, 361-362.

A dialogue takes place when evaluating Mitchell's view of black preaching. He seems to understand the traditional black preaching style as opposed to a more contemporary style. Additionally there is a criticism of Mitchell's work that is relevant in a thesis that deals with the marginalized woman. He uses the masculine gender as he speaks of the preacher's journey and tasks.

First Person Narrative Preaching

There is not only a theological but also a practical impetus for preaching to the text and using first person narrative as one mode of accomplishing that. It may be unfamiliar to the average female African American churchgoer but it is relevant to them and has an important role in the field of homiletics. The thesis writer contends that first person narrative preaching could be a way to reach female churchgoers and assist them in realizing that the message they receive from a first person narrative sermon can be attractive and relevant to their lives.

One of the hot topics in homiletics the last twenty years, perhaps the hottest topic, has been narrative preaching. We've been told that Jesus told stories, and so should we; we've been told that over half of the Bible is narrative, so we better sit up and take note that this form of communication is powerful; and we've been told that anyone who wants to reach our TV-conditioned audience had better traffic in images and plots, not ideas and arguments. I believe all of this. Many of us do, but I wonder how many of us actually preach narrative sermons. The exhortations of the last twenty years toward narrative preaching may not have done much more than make us feel guilty for not trying it. We are better at arguing for narrative sermons than we are in preaching them.²⁵

First person narrative preaching is a viable vehicle for preaching. One author who supports this position is a writer of a book that assists preachers and student preachers with the mechanics and style of that genre, J. Kent Edwards. Edwards' book, *Effective*

²⁵ Arthurs, *Performing the Story*, Preaching.com, 2010, (Accessed July 27, 2010).

First-Person Biblical Preaching highlights the rationale and strategies for writing and preaching first person narratives. Edwards is an author, preacher, professor as well as a seminary chairperson. This book can be considered as a homiletic to-do book or manual for preaching especially first person narratives. In addition to explaining the rationale, benefits and procedures for preaching first person narrative sermons, Edwards includes examples of first person narrative sermons. He also includes implementation worksheets so the preacher can organize his or her first person sermons more effectively.

It is a very effective piece of literature to promote the use of first person narrative preaching because of all of the elements included in the work. Edwards not only gives the rationale for preaching first person narratives but he also includes his own testimony of sorts. He offers his own introduction to first person sermons using a first person narrative with a personal experience of his initial attempt at using first person narrative in his own ministry. According to J. Kent Edwards, there is a fine reason for preaching first person biblical sermons.

“Congregants repeatedly complain of falling asleep during their pastor’s sermons. The unchurched choose to stay home Sunday mornings because they suspect what churchgoers already know: that it is more comfortable to sleep in bed than in a pew.”²⁶ As in a first person narrative secular story, there is a very good reason for preaching using first person narrative sermons. Edwards says, “A first-person narrative sermon communicates the idea of a biblical passage through a character with personal knowledge of the events in the passage. Preachers take on the personality of this character and

²⁶ J. Kent Edwards, *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 11.

reexperience the events of the biblical text in order to recommunicate what the original author communicated to the first recipients of the biblical narrative.”²⁷

It appears to the thesis writer that if preachers are to compete and battle with television and win the war with that medium, then first person narrative preaching may be a way to do that and wake up the sleeping and dead. This writer sees television and other forms of contemporary technology that draws people’s attention, as a competition, and a mission that may often times seem impossible. However, preachers can choose to accept the mission when they utilize first person narrative sermons. Edwards communicates that much of what people see on television are narratives in some of the popular shows. If narratives hold people’s attention and keep them from church, then fight fire with fire. Tell the biblical story in a way that people will want to come to church.

Preaching should have a purpose and one main purpose is to facilitate the hearers understanding of God’s Word. Communication of the message to the listener is of the utmost importance. Consideration of what God was saying to people in the Bible and then relating it to what he is saying to the people of today is crucial. First person sermons can be an important medium for establishing that purpose.

Most Christians would be shocked to discover how much God says in his word about communicating. The common theme in almost all of those passages, however, is *power*—complete confidence in *God’s* power.

Paul, for instance, reminded the Corinthian believers that he came to them “in weakness and fear, and with much trembling” (1 Cor.2:3), but that was only how he *felt*, not how he came across. They witnessed that his “message and [his] preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of

²⁷ Edwards, *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching*, 13.

the Spirit's power," and they believed because their faith rested on that demonstration of God's power conveyed through Paul's demeanor (1Cor.2:4-5).²⁸ Preaching is about communicating. When trying to preach to un-churched and marginalized women, there may very well be inner hindrances. However, not allowing those inner hindrances to become outward manifestations or blockages to doing God's work is of utmost important. In the fast-paced world in which one does ministry, introduce people to various mediums to hear the Word of God. One may question his or her ability to prepare a dramatization, preach one or even attempt something new.

According to Dictionary.com, "communicating is to give or interchange thoughts, feelings, information, or the like, by writing, speaking, etc, to express thoughts, feelings, or information easily or effectively, to impart knowledge of; make known."²⁹

Communication is the basis for preaching and especially in using first person narrative sermons to reach, impact and change the lives of people.

God asks us to preach the whole counsel of God. Our congregations ask us to be interesting and creative. How can we do both? By recognizing that God inspired the words as well as the genres of Scripture, and allowing both to influence our sermons. For many preachers, unfortunately, seminary training in preaching merely furnished them with a set of homiletical cookie-cutters, which they routinely mashed down upon the dough of the text, and presto! Out pops a little star, or a tree, or a gingerbread man... No matter that the text doesn't want to go into these forms, the poor thing is mashed and tortured until it is made to say things it never intended to say."³⁰

This thesis writer concurs with these two preaching authors. It is evident that first person narrative preaching is authentic and true to the text as well as inspiring. Many authors have written on the form and techniques of preaching. Preachers use various styles and techniques of preaching. Some preachers purport that preaching should consist

²⁸ Bert Decker and Hershael W. York, *Speaking with Bold Assurance*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 5.

²⁹ *Dictionary.com*, LLC. (Accessed November 5, 2010).

³⁰ Clyde Fant, *Preaching For Today*. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1975), 110.

of three points and a poem. The Bible is not merely a compilation of three points and poems so sermons should not be that either.

This article is a modest attempt to equip the already (or partially) convinced. It takes a practical approach to a particular type of narrative preaching, the first person sermon -- sometimes called the "dramatic monologue."

What Is A First Person Narrative Sermon?

A first person narrative sermon is a form of preaching which expounds and applies a biblical text by retelling the story through the perspective of a character in the story. The personality of the preacher is subordinated to the personality of the narrator who is an observer or participant in the story. The first person narrative sermon uses first person pronouns (for example, "I said to her... Then I went to the Temple...I tried to hide, but he saw me.") Sometimes this kind of sermon is called the "dramatic monologue" because (surprise!) it is dramatic and it is a monologue. This term makes some preachers uneasy because it blurs the lines between acting and preaching. True, but I believe that it's possible faithfully to exposit a text and capitalize on the power of a story well told. Drama and preaching are not necessarily at odds.³¹

Some might question the validity of preaching first person narrative sermons.

However, preachers are doing that kind of preaching and with success. Success in preaching is a complex idea. One of the goals of preaching is to have the listeners hear the Bible story and understand what the biblical text is saying. Since the contemporary or younger people of the twenty-first century have exposure to radio, television, computers, iPad's, iPod's and other technological mediums and advances, to reach them they have to be included in homilies.

Thus, Haddon Robinson and this thesis writer agree that, "in the last twenty years, the culture has changed. Television and the computer have influenced the ways we learn and think. Narrative preaching has come into vogue and reflects the reality that listeners in a television culture think with pictures in their heads."³²

³¹ Jeffrey Arthurs, *Performing the Story*, Preaching.com, (Accessed July 27, 2010).

³² Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 10.

Reading about the perspective of pastors who find that first person sermons can accomplish their goal is encouraging and inspiring. One can preach this type of sermon and still get the message across to various audiences. It may be a new type of sermon for some but it is a viable vehicle for homiletics.

Preaching first person narrative sermons can be effective if one just puts in the work. A preacher cannot be lazy. Some believe there are preachers who do not do adequate enough study or preparation prior to writing or preaching a sermon. Just like there are lazy politicians, teachers, doctors, sanitation workers, there are lazy preachers. If we are to do the work of evangelism, spread the good news and win souls to Christ, we cannot be lazy. One of the criticisms of first person narrative preaching is that it is hard work or challenging. If you are serious about giving the listeners what they need and being true to the Great Commission, step out on faith and try it. It may be work but anything worth doing is worth doing well and putting in the effort.

Aren't First Person Sermons A Lot Of Trouble to Prepare? Why Bother? Yes, this kind of sermon takes longer to prepare than "three points and a poem," but the advantages make it worthwhile. If preachers mix in only one or two monologues a year they'll add some zing to their homiletical stew. Why bother? For two reasons: To adapt to our culture, and faithfully to exposit the text.

Cultural critics such as McLuhan, Ong, Muggeridge, Postman, Ellul, and Guinness have argued persuasively that a shift in communication media has taken place in modern western culture: a shift from print culture to electronic culture, (a mixture of orality, typography, and pictures).¹ With the shift in the way we communicate came a shift in the way we think. We now derive knowledge and judge truth based more on image and story than on propositional argument. As Postman explains, "A new major medium [television] changes the structure of discourse; it does so by encouraging certain uses of the intellect, by favoring certain definitions of intelligence and wisdom, and by demanding a certain kind of content -- in a phrase by creating new forms of truth-telling."² Postman claims that we have created new forms, but in reality we are merely returning to old forms, or at least one old form -- story.³³

³³ Arthurs, "Performing the Story", 1, preaching.com, (Accessed November 18, 2010).

Since we have decided that, we are going to put out the effort and preach first person narrative sermons despite the challenge and possible intensive labor, here is what authors in the field of homiletics particularly first person sermon greats have to say about its validity, necessity and technique.

According to Torrey Robinson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Tarrytown, New York:

The essential distinctive of a first-person sermon is we tell the story from the vantage-point of one character in the narrative. For example, the biblical story of Ruth was written from a third-person perspective, in which the unnamed narrator stands outside the story as he tells it. To preach Ruth from a first-person perspective you enter into the story and retell it from the vantage point of Boaz, Ruth, Naomi, or any other eyewitness to what transpired.³⁴

This perspective reinforces the premises of this thesis writer and is significant because it speaks about one of the chosen scriptures included in this thesis project.

The name Torrey Robinson appeared to sound familiar. The thesis writer began warranted research. Torrey Robinson is the son of Haddon Robinson, a preacher who grew up hearing first person sermons by one of the masters of that genre. This author had the privilege of attending Torrey Robinson's workshop on first person preaching at GCTS in South Hamilton, MA.

When preaching first person narrative sermons there are other considerations, of which one should be aware. Besides dramatization, which includes monologues, the use of props and costumes can assist the preacher in making the sermon come alive for the audience.

³⁴ "First Person Narrative Sermons", "Taking advantage of the power of drama and the pull of story", *An article by Torrey Robinson*, <http://www.preachingtodaysermons.com/fipenase.html>, Preaching Todaysermons.com. Torrey Robinson is pastor of First Baptist Church in Tarrytown, New York, and coauthor of *It's All in How You Tell It* (Baker, 2003), (Accessed November 19, 2010).

The use of props might enhance any sermon. The thesis writer has used them in Old Testament sermons for example when she told the story of Moses with his cane or shepherd's staff and it became a snake preparing to lead the people before they could cross the Red Sea. In that particular sermon, she borrowed her husband's fancy wooden cane with a snake carving on it. She then threw it down much as she envisioned Moses did in Exodus 4:2-5. Another time the prop was a blanket when she gets on the floor upon a blanket borrowed from one of the parishioners and reenacted Moses lying prostrate before the Lord. She used this blanket to lay prostrate as Moses did before God in Deuteronomy 9:18 and Numbers 16:22. The congregation was amazed because they had never seen anyone re-enact this Moses experience but they did remember the biblical story and the message of the sermon.

When preaching the Mary and Martha story in first person narrative, I portray Martha preparing for the meal with Jesus and the other guests. The props include my large white plastic mixing bowl and a large wooden spoon. The preacher researched the foods that probably biblical characters might consume at the meal. Although she did not actually bring the food as props, she mentioned them in the sermon. She does occasionally bring the foods mentioned in the scripture or of that time in biblical history.

As in any dramatization, first person sermons too, costumes are an integral component that helps to set the scene and put the sermon in a proper perspective. Usually when the thesis writer preaches the Mary and Martha story she would dress as she thought Mary would. She has a pink, green, cream-colored ankle length dress that looks like my idea of Mary resting at Jesus feet. Now that the preacher dramatizes Martha, a different outfit is in order. Over the dress worn, she places an apron. The apron is black

and white and has a message on it stating, “Queen of Everything”. She dons a scarf, head wrap or chef’s hat to augment the costume’s effect. In preaching, the hip-hop woman at the well sermon the plan was to wear a ‘Hoochie’ type outfit in the beginning and do a quick change at the end into a denim skirt or pants and denim top. These costumes should assist the teens and young adults to see that there is nothing wrong with some of the clothes they wear. The preacher would like them to understand that when we dress a particular way we may be setting ourselves up for certain treatment.

For the children’s sermon, the costume may either be how the preacher imagines the girls in Esther’s story may have dressed or as a young person dresses today. Costumes will be an effective contribution to the sermon.

Torrey Robinson’s article gives an informative perspective on costumes.

Costumes, make-up, and props all deserve consideration as you plan your presentation of a first-person sermon. While a costume is not essential to the success of a first-person sermon, a well designed costume may enhance your presentation. I own several costumes that have been made for me over the years. In most cities you can rent quality costumes from costume shops. You can use props along with a costume or sometimes in place of a costume, but props can also get in the way.³⁵

It is important not to let props get in the way. Use props sparingly and wisely. Before preaching the Hip-Hop sermon, the preacher tried on an outfit to wear for her husband’s opinion. He suggested that since she is not a teenager, she should not dress like one. The preacher took his advice and wore another outfit that looks appropriate for ministering to teenagers and young adults. Her husband believed that the costume would get in the way. She looked for a prop for the Hip-Hop sermon and decided to use an iPad

³⁵ Torrey Robinson, “First Person Narrative Sermons: Taking advantage of the power of drama and the pull of story” in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching. A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 451.

to hold as one. However when she preached the sermon, she did not use the iPad. She did not use any props.

In addition to props and costumes, Bible study and sermon preparation is crucial. In the actual crafting of the sermon, Jeffery Arthurs gives interesting insight of methods and literary elements that enhance the delivery of the sermon. He states that irony is an excellent literary element to include in your sermons.

(2) Use irony. Through irony, communicators prompt the audience to reconstruct their intended meaning, even when they do not state that meaning. Sometimes they even state the opposite of what they intend. For example, Donald Sunukjian preaching the entire story of Esther employs irony to communicate his central idea. To prompt the audience to comprehend God's sovereignty, the narrator (a pagan Persian) states: "Hmmm, those Jews sure are lucky." Of course, perceptive audience members think: "Lucky? No! This is God at work. He is sovereign."³⁶

Another essential component of narrative preaching is the elements of narrative story. The main parts, or elements, of a story are the setting (when and where a story takes place), the characters (the people a story is about), and the plot (what happens in a story). The plot usually involves a problem or a conflict that must be resolved. The resolution is the solution to the problem.

According to Jeffrey Arthurs in *Performing the Story: How to Preach First Person Narrative Sermons*, conflict is an essential piece of preaching First Person sermons. Just as in any narrative literary piece, conflict is crucial in summarizing, preaching and portraying the story. He uses the Mary and Martha story as one illustration of how one ought to include conflict to preach first person sermons effectively.

Typical conflicts are person vs. person (David and Goliath), person vs. society (Jesus and the Pharisees), person vs. God or supernatural being (Jacob wrestles with an angel), person vs. self (Jesus in the Garden), and person vs. nature (the

³⁶ Arthurs, *Performing the Story*, 5.

disciples on the stormy sea). Of course, we must never forget that the conflict underlying all biblical stories is good vs. evil or God vs. evil. God is the protagonist of all biblical stories.

Rising Action. This is the longest portion of most stories. It intensifies the conflict toward the breaking point. For example, the conflict and rising action of the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) could be presented as follows:

I (Martha) was boiling mad. My sister was such a dreamer. No help at all. (The basic conflict is presented). One day the Lord and his followers came to my house unexpectedly. I needed help. (The action rises). I searched for Mary, and where did I find her? Sitting with the men! Doing nothing! (The conflict is intensified). Well, I had had enough. I marched up to Jesus, explained how Mary was no help to me, folded my arms, and waited for the rebuke. (The conflict can't go on much longer; a breaking point is near). The rebuke came, all right. But not as I expected. The Lord rebuked me! He said...(Jesus' words are the climax of the story).³⁷

Although his focus on and portrayal of Martha is not exactly the one the writer of this thesis chose, it does assist one in understanding one perspective of Martha in the story.

It is also crucial to understand and utilize the various components of literature and preaching styles when attempting to reach un-churched and marginalized women. Various authors have written about homiletics, narratives, culture, age and gender issues, which address the un-churched and marginalized. One can expedite reaching out to young un-churched and marginalized women by reaching them where they are and using a genre with which they are familiar in this technological and theatrical setting.

³⁷ Arthurs, *Performing the Story*, 6.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY OF THE FIRST PERSON NARRATIVE SERMONS

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

--Luke 10:41-42 NIV

“Were you really an orphan?” A child posed this question to the preacher and writer of this thesis. No, she was not an orphan when she was growing up but sometimes as the songwriter penned she does feel like a motherless child. A female acquaintance told the thesis writer that she had left her church because after leaving church service most Sundays, she felt anger, hurt and/or pain. She said she just could not put her finger on what exactly it was but every sermon sounded like it did not include her, her sisters, her girlfriends, her aunts or her mother. Her perception was that the sermon represented God as a domineering boss, Jesus appeared to be the head of an old boys’ network and the women were either not mentioned by that pastor or were much too insignificant. Sometimes she feels angry when she leaves church and she cannot put her finger on why. She feels like she might explode. “Isn’t church supposed to be a safe, accepting and comforting place?” She asked. Thus, the writer of this thesis can relate to the sentiments in the song, “Sometimes I feel Like a Motherless Child.” One belief is that a slave wrote this song in the 1800s. The thesis writer deduces that other females concur with its sentiments.

Back in 1993, William Hendricks published a series of exit interviews with men and women who had decided to leave the churches they had attended. In his summation, he spoke about the anger women feel as they depart from the various churches they once attended. He likened that anger to a ticking time bomb. Churches represent Christianity as insensitive. But Matthews says that Hendricks is not alone in observing the ongoing exodus of women from Christian churches.

In more than three decades of ministry to women, I have listened again and again to the heartbreak of women who wanted to love God with all their hearts, souls, minds and strength but who could not hear or see a biblical vision of God in the church.¹

This chapter discusses the project design used to create the project and information about the accompanying sermon preparation involved in the project to prove the hypothesis theorized in chapter one of this project. The hypothesis investigated is first person narrative and “Big Idea”² sermons can introduce un-churched and/or marginalized females to marginalized females in the Bible and help these contemporary females to understand the Biblical story and thus believe that Jesus can transform their lives as well. Additionally this thesis and the culminating project are in dialogue with the process of using first person narrative sermons to assist in evangelistic efforts with these and other marginalized and/or un-churched females.

To test the hypothesis that first person narrative sermons can reach females where they are, draw them into the worship experience, the thesis writer wrote, and preached six sermons. What follows are the scriptural references or texts utilized for each of those sermons. The four sermons are included in the appendix of this thesis on pages A, B, C, and D.

This project consists of four sermons preached on six different occasions to marginalized or un-churched females bout biblical marginalized females. There were two sermons from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. The Old Testament sermons come from the books of Ruth and Esther. The New Testament sermons are from

¹ Matthews, *Preaching That Speaks to Women*, 162.

² “Big Idea” preaching is a distinctive school of preaching which Haddon Robinson, Senior Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program and Harold Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary has helped to popularize through his seminal work at the South Hamilton campus referenced in chapter one of this thesis.

the books of Luke and John. The thesis writer preached two of the sermons for this thesis at nursing care centers. She preached one at Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center at 321 Centre Street in Dorchester, MA on Sunday, November 14, 2010 at 2:00 PM. The thesis writer preached the other one at the Boston Home Nursing Care Center in Dorchester, MA on Sunday, November 28, 2010 at 2:00 PM. She preached one at Jesus Mission Church in Dorchester, MA at a women's Bible study on Friday, June 25, 2010 at 6:00 PM. The thesis writer preached another one at a children's Bible study at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church in Dorchester, MA on Tuesday, November 23, 2010 at 6:00 PM. She preached the woman at the well sermon initially at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church on Sunday December 12, 2010 at 3:30 PM. The author of this thesis preached the last sermon for this project Sunday January 30, 2011, 12:00 noon at a Bible study worship service at a pastor's home in Randolph, MA, at New Life International Christian Center.

The four books of the Bible Esther, Ruth, John, Luke have major and minor themes that are relevant to many situations contemporary females may encounter in their daily lives. As a component of this analysis, the preacher composed surveys and questionnaires to test the hypothesis surmised. The thesis writer generated a fifteen-question survey but eventually narrowed it down to five questions. These are included in the appendix as an appendix E and F. See the information about the selection of the survey participants on page 81 of this thesis.

General Descriptions of the Audiences

The audiences hearing the sermons differed in nationality, age and gender. There were solely black audiences in the congregations at the Jesus Mission Church and both sermons at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church. At the sermons at Saint Josephs and the Boston Home there was a very diverse group of people including white Americans, black Americans, Haitian Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, Cuban Americans and some with Caribbean heritages.

Nationality of the Congregations

In the audiences at the various sermons, there were African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Haitian Americans, European Americans, Africans, Dominicans, and Caribbean Americans. The thesis writer was not positive how nationality would affect the listeners of the sermons. It does not appear that nationality was a major factor in the receptivity of the various audiences. Overall, the thesis writer did not design the sermons for one particular nationality but the Hip-hop sermon may have appealed to people of color more. However, Rap and Hip-hop are captivates white youths in today's society, as youths in general seem to have a proclivity toward that genre.

Age of the Congregations

The ages of the audiences varied too. There were children at every sermon except the sermon at Jesus Mission Church as well as at one of the nursing care centers. The thesis writer wrote the Hip-hop sermon for teenagers and young adults but children and adults were in the audiences as well. The ages of the audiences ranged from toddlers to senior citizens in their golden years up through one hundred years at the different

locations of the sermons. The ages of the population at the various venues were diverse and that was a significant factor in the receptivity of the various people in attendance.

Gender Parameters

Although females were the targeted audience for the sermons, males were present. At the Mary and Martha sermon at Jesus Mission Church the only male present was the pastor of the church. At the Martha and Mary sermon at Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center there were four males present. At the Esther sermon preached for girls there were boys, girls, women and men in attendance. For the Ruth sermon at the Boston Home Nursing Care Center, there were adult males present. At the Hip-hop sermon at Greater Light Temple of Christ, there were two men and one boy. At the Hip-hop sermon in Randolph, there were boys, teenage boys and adult males. The men were receptive to the preached Word as well as the women. That is how sermons should be. All who come hungry should go away full.

Sermon Summaries

The Book of Esther opens with a family where an orphaned young girl and her uncle and aunt have taken her in to raise her. This scripture alludes to issues facing children, teenagers and young adults are in. The preacher preached the sermon from the book of Esther one time. She preached it at the Greater Light Temple of Christ Church in Dorchester, Massachusetts as a component of a Bible Study. The congregants at the Esther sermon were primarily children. There were fifteen young people and five adults present at this sermon on Tuesday, November 23, 2010. The adults did not participate in the survey except to assist their children. This was the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. The

pastor wanted an activity for the children who regularly attend the Bible Study. One mother questioned why the sermon would take place over the busy Thanksgiving week.

The thesis writer preached the Ruth and Naomi sermon at the Boston Home located at 2049 Dorchester Ave in Dorchester, MA on November 14, 2010. From the Book of Ruth the thesis writer utilized various chapters and verses to create the sermon. A well-known African proverb states that it takes a village to raise a child and in this case a female one. Many contemporary young girls have albatrosses around their necks. If sermons can contribute to the elimination of an albatross before it is too late, then preachers have begun to embark upon the journey in a preaching ministry. The biblical women referred to in the sermons for this project had albatrosses around their necks too. Some of these albatrosses around their necks suppressing them might be loss of parents prior to adulthood, dropping out of school at an early age, being court involved, teenage pregnancy, under-achieving in school, poverty, single parenthood, physical or sexual abuse, and depression.

Esther was an orphan whose uncle raised her. They lived in slavery, as was the case of other Jewish people. God gave her an opportunity to go from being a marginalized, orphaned slave girl to become a queen who was instrumental in the saving of her people. The death of Naomi's husband and sons generated her marginalized and embittered sentiment. She was living in a foreign land and God turned her life back from bitter to sweet with a daughter-in-law and grandson. Mary and Martha displayed sibling rivalry, differences in style and opinion, and opposing ways of spending time with Jesus. Jesus told them that day, at that time; Mary had chosen what was better. The woman at

the well was living a marginalized and unholy life. Jesus did not judge or condemn her; he just told her all about her life and the Living Water that he could supply to her.

Marginalized girls and women fought from the 1940s through the 1990s to play an integral part in society. This is a reason to reach female audiences. One reason in the past women fought is so women today can have and make choices. If women want to be fashion models, actors, singers, rappers, ball players, doctors, lawyers, ministers, preachers, pastors, bishops or anything else, they can. Females need a quality education so they can make informed and meaningful choices. A meaningful spiritual life and growth could also augment that endeavor.

Survey/Questionnaire

The first survey/questionnaire administered was a fifteen-question survey prior to the sermon and re-administered following the sermon. See appendix E. The preacher used this survey to ascertain the understanding of the congregants before the sermon and after it. After the first sermon, the preacher shortened the questionnaire to five questions because it proved to require too much time of the respondents. See appendix F.

In spite of Bible studies, church services, and Sunday sermons, many of the female congregants could not answer the question, “Who are the characters in the scriptures?” used in the four sermons written and preached for this project. Something has to make the scriptures come alive for them and be relevant to their lives in this postmodern age. Being optimistic, it was conjectured that after hearing the first person narrative sermons the participants could answer the questions on the survey, retain the information and it would positively impact their lives.

The final five questions used for the survey are 1. Are you familiar with the

scripture of Luke 10:38-42? 2. Who are the characters in the scripture? 3. Have you ever heard a first person narrative sermon? 4. What is happening in the story? 5. What might Jesus be saying to us?

The thesis writer constructed first person narrative sermons to reach females from children to those in their golden years. Using the Book of Ruth, the Book of Esther, the story of Martha and Mary hosting Jesus at their home, and the woman at the well, facilitated the hearers to ponder how Jesus could be relevant to women in the Bible and to them as well. Sometimes un-churched people do not realize that many of the problems they face today are not new.

Preaching to young adult females is interesting. The thesis writer has encountered some females who appear to be hungry for a Word from the Lord. There are so many obstacles in life for women but not hearing the Word or an interesting and effective sermon should not be one of them. After researching this topic, the writer of this thesis consulted another preaching site, [Sermonillustrations.com](http://www.sermonillustrations.com). At that site, she found this information, which also substantiates her supposition that it is essential to reach contemporary females. Although this is a twenty-five year old quotation, it is still relevant for contemporary women because not much has changed in the way society views or treats in more than twenty years. “Today's young women are more likely to become depressed than their mothers were and at a younger age. Reasons: increased economic pressure to contribute to family income...changing role in society...inability to meet their own expectations...a sense of having lost control.”³

³ Dr. Gerald Klerwan, *Homemade*, December 1986. www.sermonillustrations.com/az/w/women.htm, (Accessed October 15, 2010).

Although the thesis writer penned and preached the four sermons at six different venues for contemporary women, she realized that she must use Old Testament as well as New Testament scriptures. Highlighting the importance of the Old Testament as relevant to contemporary females is crucial. She did not preach the New Testament sermons before the Old Testament sermons as one might imagine because the venues and the audiences did not allow for that. However, for this text, she is writing about the Old Testament sermons first and noting them in biblical order except when addressing the actual preaching of them. She preached the Mary and Martha sermon first because she had written that one first.

To emphasize the importance of sermons that women can relate to and the necessity for speaking to them as a separate entity this quote reinforces that sentiment. According to Hillary Rodham Clinton, the following is true: "Very important: the US wants to put women at the centre of its development policy." Read Clinton's actual words: "Well, you know the proverb, 'Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, but teach a man to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime'? (SIC) Well, if you teach a woman to fish, she'll feed the whole village."⁴

This thesis writer not only wants to feed females, but she wants to teach them how to fish so the entire village will receive spiritual nourishment. After feeding the females and thus the entire village, the author of this thesis will evaluate the villages and the females' comprehension of the scriptures contained in the sermons.

⁴ Hillary Rodham Clinton, Jan 6, 2010, from a speech Secretary Clinton: Development in the 21st Century *updated* ? The prepared text of U.S. of Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's speech, delivered to the Center for Global Development in Washington, D.C., http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/01/06/hillary_clinton_on_development_in_the_21st_century (Accessed December 6, 2010).

Since attempting to reach various congregations with differing levels of manual dexterity, cognitive awareness, physical ability, biblical understanding and pedagogical knowledge, the assessment tools will vary from congregation to congregation the writer created or compiled different assessment tools for the various audiences. Some of the basic questions are similar. The format used for asking the questions varied with the different audiences and the number and content of questions changed as well. The writer started with a fifteen-question survey but eventually narrowed it down to five due to the time constraints and the audiences' ability to answer the questions. Since she was preaching at services, she had to be mindful of the various dynamics that could impact the preaching moment.

She pondered whether to have written evaluations and survey questions but in most services, she asked the questions orally. She did this for a couple of reasons. One is the time element and being able to expedite the worship service. The other reason is the ability of the audience to respond in writing and their knowledge of the material assessed in the survey questions. The women and girls came with different expectations and church experiences. Some of the females are active church members; others attended church regularly throughout childhood but are now in the number of un-churched because they have not attended a church regularly in the past six months to a year.

Luke 10:38-42: What's For Dinner? And Busy May Not Always Be Better

The thesis writer wrote two sermons based upon this scripture while completing her preaching residency in the Pastoral Skills for the Twenty-first Century track of the Doctorate of the Ministry Program. She wrote a different one for a revival at a church in Mattapan, MA and then was given the same scripture to write a first person narrative

sermon for her residency at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The sermon written for the revival was not a first person narrative sermon but she added that piece to it for preaching at the revival.

Ultimately, before preaching the Martha and Mary sermon the thesis writer wrote a new sermon. This time she portrayed Martha and preached from her perspective in addition to preaching from Mary's perspective prior to the Martha sermon. She borrowed a white apron from the kitchen staff in the cafeteria. She brought a large mixing bowl and wooden spoon from home and portrayed Martha in preparation for dinner with Jesus. Preaching the sermons and portraying the role of Martha was a novel idea, which the thesis writer conceived just that week during the writer's workshop. This served as a trial run for the preaching of the Martha and Mary sermon.

The preacher began as Mary again looking out to see if Jesus is coming. When Jesus appeared, she sat on the floor so she could hang on his every Word as Mary might have done as described in the text. She eventually became Martha and busied herself with the preparations of the meal and the chores. She lamented to herself but loud enough for the congregation to hear that Mary was not helping me with all of the preparations. She called and asked Jesus did not he care that Mary had left her to do all the work by herself. She asked him to tell her to help her. 'When Jesus responded, "Martha, Martha," "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41 & 42). She muttered to herself aloud about how she wants to spend time with Jesus but there is just so much to do in terms of preparation.

Initial Worship Service

An initial sermon for this thesis occurred at a women's Bible study at Jesus Mission Church in Dorchester, MA on Friday, June 25, 2010 at 6 PM. The scripture was Luke 10:38-42 when Jesus was at the home of Martha and Mary. The setting for this sermon was a small church in Dorchester where a male pastor holds a weekly women's Bible study. They were previously having Bible studies facilitated by a non-Christian male. The attendance of the women had declined because there was no woman to facilitate the Bible study. The pastor began looking for a female Christian to facilitate the Bible study. The thesis writer agreed to facilitate one Bible study lesson based upon the Mary and Martha story. At this Bible study, there were six women and the pastor in attendance.

Prior to the first person narrative sermon, the preacher disseminated a survey in the form of a brief questionnaire (See appendix E). The women answered a fifteen-question survey prior to hearing the sermon and then answered the same questions after the completion of the sermon. Most of the women could only answer five of the questions the first time. The thesis writer disseminated the same survey at the conclusion of the sermon, and the women answered even more of the questions. Of the fifteen questions asked to this audience, the women were able to answer the questions about the characters and the scripture reference after the sermon. For the remaining sermons, the thesis writer drafted a shorter questionnaire because of the age and physical abilities of the audiences. The time constraints and the total number of people present at future sermons and their prior knowledge necessitated a shorter questionnaire.

For this sermon, she not only preached but also taught a Bible study. She prepared a full lesson on the story of Mary and Martha with activities. She actually gave the women a packet of activities related to the scripture. There was a crossword puzzle, a word search and an activity related to discussion of women's issues. She gave them copies to take home to their daughters.

When the first person narrative sermon began, she wore an outfit that she thought Mary might wear. The thesis writer has a pink, green and cream outfit that she usually wears at a scheduled preaching of the Mary and Martha sermon. She purchased it from a woman who sells African dresses. The outfit looks to the author much like an outfit that a young woman in biblical times might wear. A head wrap accompanies the dress and she wears that as well.

The worship service began with singing songs that accompany the scripture well. The songs sang were "We Have Come into This House", "This Is the Lord's Church", "and What a Mighty God We Serve", "He Is Lord, He Lives." She chose these songs because they talk about being in the presence of Jesus, having a right relationship with him, and/or praising and worshiping him. She sang some or all of these songs every time she preached the Mary and Martha sermon unless, as was the case at the nursing care center, the coordinator had already chosen songs. She usually had to teach the audience at least some of the songs. They liked them and informed her that they will teach them to their congregations and women's ministries.

The pastor made a few remarks and prayed before the Bible study began. The preacher prayed and told them the scripture. She disseminated the questionnaire and collected them. Then she began the sermon. She began the sermon as Mary looking out to

see if Jesus is coming. When Jesus appears, she sat on the floor so she could hang on his every Word as Mary might do in the actual text. After the sermon was over, she re-administered the questionnaire and had the women complete them again. Then she started the remainder of the activities.

Table 1. Demographics of the Jesus Mission Church Sermon

Jesus Mission Church Demographics		
Total Number of People in Attendance	7	
Gender	Female: 6	Male: 1
Age Composition	30-49	50-100
	3	4

Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center

The thesis writer primarily preached this sermon to the elderly. One of the reasons for preaching to the elderly in nursing homes is that it is generally more difficult for the elderly and handicapped to get out to church physically. Accordingly, a minister at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts began a nursing home and elder's ministry in 1999. The name of one particular component of her ministry is "The Wisdom Bearers Ministry". The contention is that the elderly have wisdom that others need to tap into and incorporate into their lives and the lives of others. The elderly are receptive and interested in attending church. That is obvious by the numbers who attended the services. One of the reasons that the coordinator, Reverend Tina Janey-Burrell began that ministry is because not many people want to do it. She recognized a need and set out to fill it. That ministry is performing a community service as it reaches out to those women whom many have forgotten in society.

This service began at 2:00 pm at the Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center located at 321 Centre Street in Dorchester, MA. There were eighteen people present at the worship service. There were four males and fourteen females. In the past, the preacher was regularly involved with this ministry. She had co-coordinated it with another minister when the present coordinator was recuperating from a medical condition. She chose the songs for the worship service. After the sermon, we partook in communion. They serve communion as a component of the worship service every month in that nursing care center ministry. The preacher had to spoon-feed the congregation physically the bread and the wine. Since this service was at the nursing home, the preacher asked some of the survey questions orally. After the sermon, she re-questioned the congregation.

This time the service opened with the singing of the songs that the ministry coordinator had selected. After asking the survey questions, singing the songs and the praying, she began the sermon. The thesis writer preached the Mary sermon first and then they sang another song, and she was able to get into costume as they sang. She came out with the outfit, and she had purchased a new apron that has “Queen of Everything” on it. The colors are black, white and green. She had a scarf on her head which helped to set the scene of Martha’s busyness.

Table 2. Demographics of the Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center Sermon

Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center Demographics			
Total Number of People in Attendance	18		
Gender	Female: 14		Male: 4
Age Composition	20-30	30-49	50-100
	2	2	14

Esther “Trade Your Cross for a Crown”

From the story of Esther for exegesis and preaching preparation, she set the stage through sermon preparation to discuss the details of the story line of Esther being an orphan. She primarily used chapter two to write the sermon. She decided to focus on the portion of the story, which deals with Esther and her relationship with her uncle Mordecai for the children. She also had to connect the piece about Esther becoming royalty and being instrumental in saving her people.

There were fifteen children and five adults present at the sermon at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church located at 1654 Dorchester Avenue in Dorchester, Massachusetts on November 23, 2010 at 6:00 PM. Her eight-year-old grandson was at this sermon. He has attended the Bible study a couple of other times when she taught the class. Before she preached the sermon she held a question and answer session and administered the five question survey to the children. Two of the children were not old enough to be able to write and answer the questions so she asked their mother to do it for them. The adults did not participate in the survey because they were primarily there to assist the children.

She preached this sermon for children focusing especially on girls at the church. For this Esther sermon, she met with the pastor, Reverend Robert DeRosa who has a large children’s ministry at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church at 1654 Dorchester Avenue in Dorchester, MA. He provides tutoring to children and youth after school. He agreed to have her preach the sermon at his Tuesday night Bible Study. He usually encourages her to facilitate a Bible study lesson for his youth. The plan was to preach about the Esther story from Esther’s perspective.

Prior to preaching the sermon, the preacher asked questions about the scripture and certain other stories with a theme of children fending for themselves. She asked if anyone had ever read the books *Homecoming* or *Dicey's Song*. These two books deal with a theme of children having to be on their own and have been on the reading lists of some of the local public schools. She wanted to introduce the children to the theme of orphaned children and their overcoming of even that challenge. Some of the other stories she consulted were *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Hobbit*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Heidi* to assist her with writing the sermon for the youth regarding the theme of orphans overcoming and succeeding. She also consulted and reread some of the tales that Disney has brought to the movie screen that tell of children especially girls succeeding with one or both of their parents not involved in their lives or care. Some of those narratives are *Bambi*, *The Lion King*, *Jungle Book*, *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and of course *The Princess and the Frog*. She suggested the children read some of these books in the future because some may be reading them in school. She additionally asked them to read the entire book of Esther from the Bible.

Table 3. Demographics of Greater Light Temple of Christ Church Children's Sermon

Greater Light Temple of Christ Church Esther Sermon Demographics									
Total Number of People in Attendance	20								
Gender	Female: 14					Male: 6			
Age Composition	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-16	17-19	20-30	30-49	50-100
	2	4	4	2	3	1	1	2	1

Ruth and Naomi “Sweet, Then Bitter, Now Sweeter”

The thesis writer preached the Naomi sermon at the Boston Home located at 2049 Dorchester Avenue in Dorchester, Massachusetts on Sunday, November 28, 2010 at 2:00 PM. The thesis writer wrote this sermon with the elderly in mind. She thought that she was going to preach this sermon from Orpah’s point of view but then decided to write it for the elderly from Naomi’s perspective. She received a request to preach at the seniors’ ministry for the month of November. She was a part of that ministry before she became a pastor of her own church. The coordinator, Reverend Tina Janey-Burrell had changed the procedure since they added another nursing care center to the Sunday afternoon ministry. She informed the preacher that now the schedule is set that the person who preaches the second Sunday at Saint Josephs now also preaches the fourth Sunday at the Boston Home. She preached this sermon about Naomi turning bitter from sweet and then back to sweet again by the grace of God.

There were thirty-five people present. All of the residents were wheelchair bound. Two of the residents were former members of the church where the ministry is affiliated. Another is the son of one of the church members and the nephew of one of the female missionaries who assisted with the service that day. There were seven ministers there, but only three were ordained clergy.

It is sometimes difficult for people with physical handicaps, such as being wheelchair bound, to get out to church. This ministry provides an opportunity for a church service at their residence. Some of the women at this facility came with a relationship with the Lord. Others have come to have a relationship with him as a benefit of the worship services. The thesis writer preached the first person narrative sermon for a

few reasons. She anticipated that the audience would relate to a grandmother, Naomi, rocking her grandson. Some of the participants are grandparents and might be able to remember holding a new grandchild for the first time. She wanted them to see that a preacher can use props in a meaningful way in a sermon for a person of any age. She wanted them to receive a message that they can still be loved, cared for and contribute to the family even in their golden years.

The story of Ruth and Naomi is relevant to the lives of women. Naomi was sweet then she experienced misfortune and became bitter. With God's plan to prosper and not harm her, she became sweet again. The Bible speaks of how God allows us to experience negative situations but he will be there. In Psalm 139, David the Psalmist addresses how God is there. Sometimes society places women in a negative situation that they have no input in or control over and may have an external catalyst. Other times they take themselves to the destructive place.

Psalm 139 reveals that God perceives our thoughts from afar. God searches us and he knows us. We also can ascertain from verses seven through twelve that God is with us just as he was with Naomi through it all.

Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me,"
Even the night shall be light about me;
Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,
But the night shines as the day;
The darkness and the light are both alike to You

Although Naomi thought her life became bitter, God's Spirit was with her and watched over her. God sent Ruth to be more to her than seven sons.

Table 4. Demographics of the Boston Home Sermon

Boston Home Ruth Sermon Demographics			
Total Number of People in Attendance	35		
Gender	Female: 27		Male: 8
Age Composition	20-30	30-49	50-100
	5	7	23

Constructing the sermons is of utmost importance and consideration of preaching to un-churched and marginalized women's needs is an integral part. Since two of the audiences were largely comprised of the elderly and infirm, it is important to take into consideration the most advantageous techniques for preaching to those populations. From research done on the Internet, the thesis writer gathered this helpful piece of information regarding preaching to the elderly.

- 1) Preach the Gospel.
- 2) Be clear.
- 3) Be sensitive to cultural shifts in language usage. (No modern slang)
- 4) Slow down. I find that those with hearing loss get more from a slower presentation.⁵

⁵ Kevin Rogers, Licentiate, Sovereign Community Church, PCA, Moncton NB (post to the question: how can I preach to the elderly?) I really don't agree entirely with statement number three because I have ascertained that the elderly can enjoy and understand some contemporary vernacular. (Accessed February 7, 2010).

Samaritan Woman Sermon “A Dude Who Read Me Like I’ve Never Been Read”

After the thesis writer wrote the woman at the well sermon, she was speaking with a friend who is a graduate of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary and she read the sermon to her. Her reaction and response was, “That was amazing”. She said, “Let me put my husband on the phone and have him hear it too.”⁶ Everyone who has heard it has said that she must take it on the road. It is difficult for her to believe that her transformation occurred in such a way that she has gone from being a mother who would not allow RAP in her car to a Hip Hop preacher. She does know that by using every medium, technique and skill she is attempting to do God’s work.

Greater Light Temple of Christ Church Teenager and Young Adult Service

The woman at the well was the final sermon she preached. She preached this sermon twice before this thesis was completed. She preached it initially at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church at 1654 Dorchester Avenue in Dorchester, Massachusetts at 3:00 PM on Sunday, December 12, 2010. The congregation for this sermon was primarily young adults, one older adult and one child. The sermon did not begin until 3:20 because the people did not arrive until later than planned. The congregation was smaller than she expected but their input was very helpful to perfect the sermon for future preaching engagements. There was at least one un-churched young man present at this sermon. The entire congregation was African American. There were three males present. One was eight years old, one was in his early thirties and the other was in his fifties. The females were all in their mid to late twenties.

⁶ Interview with Reverend Marsha H. Wood, DMin, GCTS, 2010 January 12, 2011.

Table 5. Demographics of the Greater Light Temple of Christ Church Rap Sermon

Greater Light Temple of Christ Church Woman at the Well Demographics				
Total Number of People in Attendance	6			
Gender	Female: 3		Male: 3	
Age Composition in Years	7-9	20-29	30-49	50-100
	1	3	1	1

New Life International Christian Center

She then preached the Hip Hop sermon again on Sunday January 31, 2011, at a home Bible study located in Randolph, MA with a worship service consisting of members who are predominantly children and young teenagers. There were ten adult females at this service. Six adult males, four male children, and three male teenagers were present. There were seven female children and ten female teenagers. There were forty people present. This is a Haitian American ministry.

The worship service usually begins at noon around the same time that Jesus met the woman at the well. “Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) (John 4:6) Some people arrived late to the worship service that day and the minister continued to postpone beginning the service. The liturgical dance minister had another engagement around 1:30. However, the pianist had not arrived. The service finally began about 12:30 with the singing of a few songs including a mixture of hymns and gospels. The pianist appeared about 12:45, and sat at the keyboard. She played an additional song before the sermonic hymn began.

Denise Seymour ministered for the sermonic hymn. The sermonic hymn was “Jesus Met the Woman at the Well” sung by Mahalia Jackson. Denise and the preacher had discussed her ministering through liturgical dance as the sermonic preparation for the women at the well sermon but this was the first time she was able to attend one of the thesis sermons. She has danced for the preacher’s sermonic preparations in the past. Denise Seymour was excited about doing this liturgical dance because the woman at the well was the scripture that she felt the Lord gave her when she first received salvation.

The preacher modified the sermon for this congregation because there were younger children there and in response to the oral feedback and data gathered from the surveys before and after the first worship service at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church. After receiving the comments from that one, she was able to make the sermon more relevant. They told her to use less slang and incorporate slang that is more current. She did that as much as feasible.

Table 6. Demographics of the New Life International Christian Center Sermon

New Life International Christian Center Demographics									
Total Number of People in Attendance	40								
Gender	Female: 27					Male: 13			
Age Composition	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-16	17-19	20-30	30-49	50-100
	1	3	3	4	6	7	7	5	4

One expectation for this thesis is that females would experience a paradigm shift through hearing the sermons. These sermons would answer any questions about the attributes of God.

By preaching and writing these sermons the writer of this thesis discovered that some people think they know more than they do know about the Bible and/or particular scriptures. They may have a closed mind and ears to hearing something a new way. If one does not exhibit Biblical information in a familiar way, either they may not believe or they will not listen. She found that sometimes it is easier to reach the un-churched than those who consider themselves churchgoers. She also found that sometimes it is easier to reach and impact those with physical challenges than those who think they already have it all together. She also learned that children with their innocence could actually take the Bible at face value. She learned something about herself and her ability to cause an emotional reaction in others. If she just remains open to him, God will empower her and use her to help others to hear what Jesus says, do his will and have fun while doing it. Preachers can reach the churched and the un-churched by stepping out of their comfort zones and using the various genres and techniques to help make their sermons come alive and relevant to all listeners.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT OF THE FIRST PERSON NARRATIVES

The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.” Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

--Ruth 4:14-1 NIV

The thesis writer found the attempt to discover the scriptures to use to create the sermons thought provoking and enlightening. One purpose of this project was to observe the impact of first person narrative sermons and the resultant receptivity of un-churched and marginalized females. Although the anticipated audience was un-churched and marginalized females, it was significant that men heard the sermons too. Having males in the congregations assisted with attempting to assure that the sermons were politically correct, socially relevant and culturally diverse.

The writer of this thesis preached from four scriptures. Two were from the Old Testament and two were from the New Testament. The thesis writer did not preach the sermons in chronological biblical order. As the author embarked on writing this project, she was not sure what would happen for the women who experienced the sermons or for her. However, she discovered much about herself and further information about others. She learned that people are interested in knowing more about biblical females’ and how their stories can assist the women in dealing with situations in their own lives.

Luke 10:38-42 “What’s for Dinner?” and “Busy May Not Always Be Better!”

She preached this sermon for her classmates in the DMin Writers’ Workshop on Thursday, July 29, 2010. They asked if she had a questionnaire for them to complete. No questions or interviews happened at this preaching of the sermon. It was study group or a practice session. They said she should have given them an opportunity to answer the questionnaire. She told them that it was just a trial run and she will preach it to marginalized or un-churched women. However, the classmates did give her feedback. Their suggestions and feedback was encouraging, positive and appreciated. It was very fortuitous that they found the sermon to be uplifting and thought provoking.

Mary and Martha at the Jesus Mission Church

She preached the first sermon at a Bible study at the Jesus Mission Church in Dorchester, MA on Friday, June 25, 2010 at the 6:00 PM Bible study. The scripture reference was Luke 10:38-42 when Jesus was at the home of Martha and Mary. Six members of the Bible study and the pastor of the church attended the session. Each respondent replied to a questionnaire of fifteen questions. The thesis writer queried them on their prior knowledge of the scripture before the sermon. The pastor declined to participate in the survey.

For the Luke 10: 38-42 sermon, she asked questions of the congregants at the beginning of the sermon and then again at the end. Since she preached this sermon at three different arenas for different congregations the questions and the responses differed somewhat.

Sermon Questionnaire

The responses are first given here for before hearing the sermon and then for after hearing the sermon. When the respondents were told now that you have heard the sermon, answer the same questions again, the after responses are indicated immediately after the before responses.

1. Are you familiar with the scripture Luke 10:38-42? 1. Do you believe you now know the scripture Luke 10:38-42?

Prior to the sermon three respondents said, they were familiar with the scripture. One asked, "Is that the one with Mary, Martha and Lazarus"? Two could not identify the scripture. Each respondent answered in the affirmative on the after questionnaire.

2. Who are the characters in the scripture?

One respondent put "I don't know". One answered, "Mary, Martha and Lazarus". One answered, "Mary and Martha" Three did not respond. After hearing the sermon five out of the six respondents said, "Mary, Martha and Jesus". One said, "Mary, Martha, the disciples and Jesus"

3. Have you ever heard a first person narrative sermon?

Two responded no; two responded, "I believe I have". One answered, "I think so", and one replied, "Yes". Afterward the thesis writer phrased the question a bit differently. Did you like hearing a First Person Narrative scripture and sermon? Four out of the six replied in the affirmative. One said, "I am not sure if this is how a sermon should be". Another replied, "It was different than what I am used to hearing".

4. What is happening in the story?

Prior to the sermon, one respondent wrote very eloquently that the story was about Jesus visiting the home of Martha and Mary. Four others could not remember the exact context of the scripture. Another said, “I believe there is something about Mary not helping her sister, Martha”. After the sermon, four said, “Jesus came to visit with Mary and Martha”. They said, “Mary was spending time with him but Martha was cooking and making preparations for the meal”. One said, “Jesus came to be with his friends and Martha couldn’t get it together enough to just be with him”. Still another said, “Jesus wanted Martha to spend time with him but she was too preoccupied”.

5. What might Jesus be saying to us?

The responses before the sermon were very interesting. One said, “He might want us to listen to him better”. One said, “Maybe sometimes Jesus wants us to spend more time with him”. The other four could not really answer the question. After the sermon, two replied, “Spending time with Jesus is more important than serving”. One said, “Jesus wants us to hang on his every word”. One said, “Jesus wants us to not get too carried away with the mundane things all the time and spend time in worship”. One said, “Jesus is calling us as Christians to really get to know him”. The sixth one replied, “Jesus wants us to serve and minister to others but he also wants us to spend time in his Word and in prayer with him just as he wanted Martha to do”. Respondent six is the lady who invited the thesis writer to teach and preach. She knew many of the answers to the questions and appeared very confident of her biblical knowledge.

6. What might Mary have learned?

Only one could answer this question before the sermon prior to hearing the sermon. After the sermon, four replied, “Mary had made a better decision than Martha”. One said, “Jesus was happy and satisfied with Mary’s choice”. One responded, “Jesus does honor us when we spend time with him and go against the so-called norm”.

7. What might Martha have learned?

Again only one could answer this question prior to the sermon. After the sermon, three said, “she needs to change her priorities”. Two said in effect that doing all that busy work is not always necessary. The sixth person said, “She needs to work on having a right relationship with Jesus and not be so much concerned about the cooking and cleaning”.

8. In what town do Mary and Martha live?

Two said “Bethany” and the others could not answer the question prior to the message. After the sermon, the responses were the same as prior to the sermon. Only two knew that it was Bethany.

9. Who was the special dinner guest?

Three replied, “Probably Jesus” and three replied, “Most likely God” before the sermon. After the sermon, the responses were quite similar. The next time they responded to the question, five said, “Jesus.” and one said “God”.

10. Have you ever heard a sermon preached like this?

All respondents replied in the negative before and after the sermon.

11. Are you familiar with first person narrative stories?

Before the sermon, four people replied, “No” and two replied “yes”. After the sermon three replied, “Yes”, one replied “I have now experienced one”, and two replied, “I think so”.

12. Who do you think chose the better thing Mary or Martha?

Before the sermon only one answered, “Mary did”. One said, “I believe Mary might have”. None of the others could answer the question. After the sermon, everyone replied, “Mary”. One even said, “I know that Mary did because Jesus told her she did”.

13. Did you learn anything new?

No one answered this question before the sermon. This question was answered subsequent to the sermon. Four replied in the affirmative. One left the answer blank and the other said she was not sure.

14. Do you like this type of preaching?

All said prior to the sermon that they were unsure if they had seen it before or they were unfamiliar with this style of preaching. After the sermon, they all replied that they liked this style of preaching. However, three were not sure if any other preachers would attempt it.

15. In your opinion, did this style of preaching fit the scripture?

Before the sermon, no one could answer the question. Thus, the respondents only answered this question after the sermon. After the sermon, all responded in the affirmative.

Martha and Mary at Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center

The writer preached this sermon at the Saint Joseph's nursing home on Centre Street in Dorchester on November 14, 2010. There were seven female residents and two male residents. Most of the people were in wheel chairs with varying degrees of cognitive understanding and mobility. Some had a particular form of dementia.

After singing the sermonic hymn "God Gave Me a Song" the thesis writer began to preach. The group was mesmerized and appeared pleased. All enjoyed the sermon that the thesis writer preached at Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center on Centre Street in Dorchester, MA. The population that comprised the listeners was nine senior citizens who are residents of the home. She also brought her ninety-three year old father and his male caregiver. Two staff members of Saint Josephs were present. Five members of the Bethel AME Church in Boston attended and assisted with the worship experience. Eighteen people attended this worship service. Since some of the elderly could not complete a written survey, the thesis writer asked questions that required a yes or no response and for some a shake of the head. Since the residents and her father were elderly, the thesis writer read the questionnaire aloud to the congregation.

Of the eighteen people questioned none of the resident seniors indicated that they were familiar with the Luke 10:38-42 scripture. One staff member responded positively that she knew the scripture and had an idea of what the underlying theme of it is. When one of the residents heard something they understood or appreciated, they smiled and/or even said amen. She asked if they were familiar with the Luke 10:38-42 scripture. They either shook their heads in the negative or said nothing. She also asked if they had ever

experienced a first person narrative sermon. At Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center, heads moved, eyes blinked and smiles flashed.

1. Are you familiar with the scripture Luke 10:38-42?

None of respondents said they were familiar with the scripture or could identify the characters in the scripture. After hearing the sermon, all said they now know the scripture.

2. Who are the characters in the scripture?

Prior to hearing the sermon twelve respondents answered, I do not know. Six identified Mary and Martha. After the sermon, everyone identified Mary and Martha as two of the characters in the scripture. Fifteen people indicated that Jesus was there too. Five responded that the disciples were present too.

3. Have you ever heard a first person narrative sermon?

Thirteen responded no, three responded I believe I have; two replied yes. After the sermon, all of those present indicated they have now heard a first person narrative sermon.

4. What is happening in the story?

Seven respondents replied very effortlessly that the story was about Jesus visiting the home of Martha and Mary. The remaining respondents could not or did not answer the question. When questioned after the sermon they all indicated in one manner or another that the sermon was about Jesus visiting Martha and Mary.

5. What might Jesus be saying to us?

Before the sermon, no one ventured a response about what Jesus might want us to know. After the sermon, the responses were very remarkable. Five said that Jesus wants

us not to be so busy that we do not make time for him. Three said that Jesus expects us to spend time with him as we serve food and do the hospitality chores. Two replied that Jesus wants us to know that Mary was doing the better thing than Martha was that day. Six did not answer the question but either smiled or had an emotionless face. One replied, "We need to pray more" and one said, "We need to be on our knees with Jesus more often." The sermon preached at Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center in Dorchester, MA went very well.

After the service, the thesis writer rode home with her friend who is one of the members of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and an officer as well. She does not usually participate in the nursing home ministry. She gave additional feedback about the sermon. She suggested that the preacher always read the scripture again after preaching a first person narrative sermon. The coordinator asked the thesis writer to read the scripture again after she finished preaching and she consented. She also suggested that the preacher give additional commentary after preaching to ascertain the level of understanding of the theological meaning of the scripture. The preacher decided to heed those suggestions.

Esther Sermon "Trade Your Cross for a Crown!"

The second sermon preached was the Esther children's sermon preached at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church on Dorchester Avenue in Dorchester, MA on Tuesday, November 23, 2010 at the 6:00 pm Bible study. The thesis writer attempted to preach, provide dinner and do Bible study activities for the children. It was an awesome task. Others sometimes tell the thesis writer is that she overbooks or overextends herself. She did so again. When she met with the pastor to plan the worship service, we concurred

that the evening necessitated dinner because the children come to his Bible study hungry. As the preacher evaluated the experience, she realized that she tried to do too much. Instead of making her “famous spaghetti dinner”, she should have ordered pizzas.

While she was preaching the Esther sermon and saying that she was an orphan, an interesting situation occurred. One nine-year-old child asked her a question in the middle of the dramatization of Esther. The children had already asked if they could ask questions. She had previously told them to wait until the sermon was complete but this one child just asked, “Are you really an orphan?” She remained in character and replied, “Yes”. She had meant to either mention to the entire congregation or at least to check in with that child and tell her that the character she was playing was the orphan. She just kept thinking as she preached that sermon she must remain in character since it was a first person narrative. She also then thought after that question, “Yes I’m doing it”. This really works. Isn’t staying in character and being believable a component of what first person narrative sermons are about?

The thesis writer wrote and preached the second sermon especially for girls based upon the story of Esther. They served a spaghetti dinner prior to the service. She arrived at the church at 6:20 for the dinner to begin first. She had been trying to recover from a respiratory condition and did not feel her physical best. However, the bible mandates preachers to preach in season or out of season and she did as expected.

She created a survey to disseminate to the girls before and after the sermon. Since there were children present some who may not be able to read, she changed the survey a bit for the children’s sermon. The attendees were boys and girls from the Bible study in Dorchester. As she analyzed the data and the events of this sermon, she found that one

criticism of herself and the worship experience was she attempted to do too much. She overextended herself by offering to cook a meal as well as provide an arts and crafts activity. Two girls, one who is fourteen and the other is thirteen, were very vocal. When the preacher asked if people are familiar with first person narratives, they did a good job of explaining what they are. Three children said they had experienced first person narrative sermons before. The preacher's husband, who came and tried to videotape the service, remarked that she really needed to keep her focus on the preaching. This was constructive criticism, and well taken because the preacher realized that she was tired and a bit overwhelmed.

The thesis writer's grandson accompanied them to the service. When her husband asked him if he had a good time, he said yes. He had been hesitant about attending. She invited a friend with her two small children. She asked her why she was doing it on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. The thesis writer told her that was when the pastor suggested she do it because he does his youth Bible study on Tuesdays. She did concur with her that it may have been less stressful if it was not right before Thanksgiving.

There were twelve children and three teenagers at this Bible study and sermon. Respondent one was a fourteen-year-old female. Respondent two was a thirteen-year-old female. Respondent three was a ten-year-old girl. Respondent four was an eight-year-old boy. Respondent five was a twelve-year-old boy. Respondent six was a nine-year-old girl. Respondents seven, eight and nine were eight year old girls. Respondent ten was a six-year-old girl. Respondent eleven was a five-year-old boy and respondent twelve was a four-year-old boy. Respondents thirteen, fourteen and fifteen were seven year old girls.

1. Are you familiar with the Esther scripture?

No one answered in the affirmative prior to hearing the sermon. After the sermon, they all replied yes.

2. Who are the characters in the scripture?

No one could answer this question either prior to the preaching. After the sermon, ten people wrote Esther, her uncle and God. Three said Esther and her uncle. Two replied Esther, her uncle, her aunt, a king and a bad man.

3. Are you familiar with first person narrative stories?

Only two girls replied yes. They even explained what a first person narrative story is. One boy responded in the affirmative. After the sermon, they all said they had seen, been told or read in the first person.

4. Have you ever heard a first person narrative sermon?

Three answered yes and the others responded no before the sermon. After the sermon they all said they have experienced one now.

5. What might Jesus be saying to us?

Preceding the sermon, no one could give an answer. After the sermon, five children said that God wants us to know that he is there for us. Six said that God would put people in our lives to give us the things that we might not get if we do not have parents. Four said God could make the bad things in our lives good.

Upon the completion of the sermon, respondent one said she really liked the sermon. Respondent two said, "I really thought you were Esther. Another child said, "I never heard that story told like that before". Four of the girls said that was an interesting story. One boy said, "I like that story; it made me think!" One replied, "I wish you were

our Bible study teacher every Tuesday.” One responded, “I kind of felt like I was in school.” The preacher was able to ask, “Is that good or bad?” She said, “It’s good because I like reading stories about other kids.” The two little boys who were not able to write yet asked their mother if they could come again.

The thesis writer really enjoyed preaching these first person narrative sermons especially the ones for children and teenagers. Children and teenagers can be a tough audience. The noise level can give one a headache. She has recently contemplated doing youth ministry again. After preaching to the children and teenagers, she is questioning in what capacity is God calling her to work with the under thirteen year old age group for this season.

Ruth: Sweet, Then Bitter, Now Sweeter!

The thesis writer was going to preach this sermon from Orpah’s point of view but decided to focus on Naomi as a grandmother. She preached the Naomi sermon at the Boston Home Nursing Care Center in Dorchester, MA on November 28, 2010. All of the residents were in wheelchairs. There were thirty-five people present. The way the interviews went for this sermon was the thesis writer asked people to respond by raising their hands or gesturing in some way to acknowledge their responses. She is familiar with two of the respondents from attending church with them prior to their becoming residents of the nursing care center. The congregants in wheel chairs were not very vocal. They seemed receptive to the sermon and engaged. Despite their physical challenges, some of them really exhibited a love for God and the Bible. As we talked after the sermon, they smiled and one respondent said that she remembered going out to church but had not experienced a sermon quite like this before.

The preacher did not plan to preach this sermon primarily for senior citizens but it was appropriate. She preached from the role of Naomi to teach the lesson of how God can allow you to go through a bitter or difficult experience but then he can make your life sweet or pleasant again.

When she came out with the doll of a baby and went to sit down to rock him and begin the dramatization, the baby almost fell. She reacted by saying, "Oh no I can't drop my precious baby". The congregation loved it. They perked up, although confined to wheelchairs; they were vocal or gestured with their eyes and hands. Using props in this sermon was relevant and necessary. After she spoke to the baby, she removed him from the baby carrier and placed him on a blanket, which looked as if it came from biblical times. She then proceeded with the rest of the sermon. It added to the story, as props should.

Due to the physical and emotional abilities and constraints of the respondents, the thesis writer asked the questions and they responded with smiles, frowns, shaking of heads and fingers. The majority of the respondents signified that they did not know the answers to the questions or could not comprehend the questions. Consequently, all of the questions the thesis writer asked the people answered.

“Hoochie to Heroine!” or “I Met a Dude Who Read Me like I’ve Never Been Read”

The author decided upon the sermon title after long deliberation and it seemed to fit quite well. It was a while before she preached the Hip-Hop sermon to the teenagers and young adults. In anticipation after the children’s sermon, she was anxious about how it would go following preaching the other sermons. She was anxious because she did not have a venue for preaching that one and it did not appear that it would actually happen. However, she remembered and utilized the words of Robert Schuler, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”¹ Therefore, the preacher had to get tough and get going. She arranged with the pastor of the church on Dorchester Avenue to use his church to preach the sermon on Sunday, December 12, 2010 at 3:00 PM.

It is interesting that so many people speak about reaching the marginalized, doing the work of evangelism and engaging in discipleship but it appears as if people are apprehensive about allowing a Hip-Hop sermon in their churches. It was quite a task finding a venue to preach the Hip-Hop sermon. She subsequently scheduled to preach the sermon at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church on Sunday, December 26, 2010 at their Youth and Teen Service. She agreed to do that but she also called a pastor she knows who has church space for rent and asked if she could use his church to preach the sermon on a Sunday afternoon. He agreed and she used his church space to preach the sermon.

At the first sermon based upon the woman at the well, the males in the congregation were inspired and touched. They gave constructive feedback. There was a

¹ This is a popular English proverb attributed to Joseph Kennedy (father of the US President) and to an American coach Knute Rockne. A Billy Ocean single also uses it released 15th November 1985. Robert Schuler in one of his sermons also used it.

young adult male attending with his girlfriend and when asked about how the preacher should dress when preaching the sermon, he replied, "Wear your hair braided." He said that would make it more current and the teenagers and young adults could relate to that hairstyle. The preacher considered it but in the end; the thesis writer wore her hair in a long straight style when she finally preached at the Bible study.

Six people attended the sermon at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church. Out of the six people, three were males and three were females. The males represented three different age groups. There was an eight year old, an un-churched 25-30 year old, and one Christian in the 55-60 age categories. The females were all in the 25-30 age group. All of the women attend churches regularly.

After the thesis writer preached the sermon, they had a discussion. The attendees gave her some valuable feedback including criticism and compliments. They said the sermon was very good. Her husband was the older gentleman and he brought up costumes. He said do you think the preacher should have dressed like a Hoochie to prove a point. One young woman said, "Yes". Then another said maybe not like a Hoochie but dress in jeans and Jordan's (sneakers).

The congregation for this sermon at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church was primarily young adults in their mid to late twenties. They suggested that she speak with some teenagers and preteens to have them help her with using more current Hip-Hop vernacular. They remarked that some of the terms she used were outdated and the slang changes so frequently. She told them that she had gone to the Hip-Hop and current slang sites on the internet to assist her with using the correct vernacular but they told her those sites are at least two years behind the current lingo of teens and young adults. That is

interesting to know because it takes quite some time and effort to make changes or additions to the standard dictionaries.

She consulted “Online Dictionary”, to gain insight into the creation and addition of new words in our language. Another component of narrative preaching is most assuredly language and word use. The thesis writer asked questions and the people answered them.

How much does slang play a role, and what are the arguments for including slang and expletives? The greatest number of new terms comes from new technology and the sciences, including new health treatments and drugs. After that, informal language and slang contribute the bulk of the terms. Slang is the creative core of the language, and many words that began as slang are simply informal, or even unmarked, now. . . .

When people ask about “slang,” what they often really are asking about is nonstandard language, or offensive language. Nonstandard language includes words such as “ain’t”; offensive language includes racist and sexist terms, as well as traditional “swear words” relating to sex or religion. All such terms are in the College dictionary. We have extensive usage notes that give warnings about their use. . . . We think it’s vital that these words be in the dictionary so that students, second-language learners of English and anyone who isn’t sure about a term can look it up and discover the sort of effect it will have to use such a term.²

At the mention of vocabulary and vernacular, the thesis writer deemed that additional research was necessary. When one is going beyond using standard and acceptable language or vocabulary, it is essential to give background on the use of words in our language.

Another aspect of preaching these sermons that are relevant and necessary for the un-church and marginalized is a discussion of vocabulary; how words are included in the standard dictionaries and how new words become introduced. When the thesis writer used a word the other day with some young adults in a Bible study class and told them

² *Your Dictionary online, On Online Dictionary*, Dow Jones & Company, Inc. <http://www.yourdictionary.com/about/post2.html>, (Accessed December 14, 2010).

she was not sure if this is actually a word, the responses were interesting. They replied, "If Sarah Palin can make up a new word we all can, especially our Bible study teacher."

Sarah Palin may have been on the receiving end of quite a bit of mockery when she inadvertently coined the term "refudiate" last July, but now the former Alaska governor is getting her due - kind of. The New Oxford American Dictionary has named "refudiate" 2010's Word of the Year.

Palin introduced the term into the American lexicon last July when she used it in a Tweet about the proposed Islamic cultural center near the World Trade Center site in New York City. "Ground Zero Mosque supporters: doesn't it stab you in the heart, as it does ours throughout the heartland? Peaceful Muslims, pls refudiate," she posted on her Twitter account.³

Language and vernacular is important especially when preaching first person narrative sermons. One does not want to be repetitive in use of vocabulary and the thesis writer contends that just as you vary your words when writing, you must do the same when preaching especially when preaching a somewhat unfamiliar genre. The author has not always been accepting of Rap or Hip-Hop but she is learning to tolerate it at least and attempt to use it to do the work of reaching the youth with her preaching.

As a preacher, you have to know your audience. There are preachers who preach over people's heads. Preach to the crowd and do not go beyond their understanding. Yes, they can go home and look up the vocabulary but first person sermons keeps the message from getting lost in the language used. The thesis writer was once at a worship service where a preacher preached and someone in the congregation asked, "What is exegesis?" She did that because the preacher used that word in the sermon and he did not define it

³ http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20022860-503544.html, November 15, 2010 3:45 PM, "Sarah Palin's "Refudiate" Named Word of the Year" Posted by Lucy Madison 20 comments, cbsnews.com, (Accessed December 14, 2010).

for those who are unfamiliar with its definition. This preacher does not want people to have to ask those kinds of questions after she preaches.

The thesis writer usually begins worship services at the appointed time regardless of the number of people present. Preaching a sermon and wanting to ask questions before the sermon can be difficult with the time constraints. People are busy and it is important to be ready to begin as scheduled. However, the young adults arrived late on December 12, 2010. We did not actually begin the worship service until about twenty minutes after 3:00 PM. It was helpful that the church was available for as long as necessary that day.

She played Mahalia Jackson's song "Jesus Met the Woman at the Well". She had a discussion with someone mentioning that although it is an old song, some might consider it a Rap song. One might consider a Rap song in the following manner as defined by Urbandictionary.com: "Rap is a genre of music, a poetic, realistic rhyme put to a beat."⁴ Urbandictionary.com elucidates further by saying that "it used to be a respectful, decent form of music, however, it has turned bad, into utter crap listened to by posers."⁵

Of the six people present, three of the six said the sermon was excellent, one said great, one said it was very good, and one did not respond. This sermon venue and scenario allowed for a question and answer time with a lengthy discussion.

1. Are you familiar with the scripture John 4:4-28 and 39-42?

To that question, four of the six people responded that they had heard of it. One asked, "Is that the one where Jesus talks to the woman at the well?" One said, "I know I

⁴ Urbandictionary.com, (Accessed December 25, 2011).

⁵ Urbandictionary.com, (Accessed December 25, 2011).

have heard of it but I just can't remember it exactly. It was about Jesus talking with someone before his death, Right?" After the sermon, all replied that they now feel familiar with the scripture.

2. Who are the characters in the scripture?

Four could not answer the question. One said the woman at the well and Jesus. One replied, "Jesus, a woman, maybe one named Mary and the disciples." After the sermon, everyone responded that Jesus, and the woman at the well were there.

3. Have you ever heard a first person narrative sermon?

Five replied no, and the other replied, "I think so" prior to the sermon. Did you enjoy this first person narrative sermon? All replied in the affirmative after the sermon.

4. What is happening in the story?

No valid discussion happened over this question prior to the preaching of the sermon. Only one could answer that Jesus may have talked with a lady about living water. After the sermon, they were all able to explain what happened in the story.

5. What might Jesus be saying to us?

Only the respondent that answered the majority of the other questions could shed some light on this one. She replied that Jesus wants to let us know that he knows about our past and may accept us as we are. After the sermon, she reiterated her answer.

Another replied that Jesus is accepting of us and wants us to change our lives around if we are on the wrong track. The young adult gentleman replied that it seems he wants us to think that he not only changes us but expects us to help others change too. The child said, "I think I got it. God is there for us even when we are bad and he will help us be good in the future". Another replied, "Jesus isn't afraid of those who are different" "He

uses them too and cares for them". Another said, "Jesus is a friend to all". "He will clean people up, change their ways and make them tell others about the experience". The last respondent replied, "Jesus doesn't look at the marginalized and just leave them that way. He changes them and helps them to tell others about his goodness".

One of the problems with preaching these sermons was trying to preach them to un-churched and marginalized females; in a sense, society may marginalize all women. Having males present for the sermons did not negatively affect the outcome because males need to hear sermons based on scriptures with female characters. In fact, one or more males were present at each sermon, and they responded that they affected them as well. Many of those in the congregations at most of the sermons were churched. Some of the congregants at the nursing care centers might be considered un-churched because some were there for the first time.

They scheduled another sermon for December 26, 2010 at Bethel AME Church in Jamaica Plain, MA. Due to the weather and the holiday weekend when the preacher arrived at the church, the coordinator informed her of the rescheduling of the service. The pastor of the church subsequently re-scheduled it for January 9, 2011. When that day came, the pastor cancelled again because there was another snowstorm. The thesis writer encountered a pastor she knows and she informed her that she was doing Bible study on the woman at the well. The thesis writer told her that one of her sermons revolves around the woman at the well. She asked her if she would come and preach it on Sunday January 30, 2011. The thesis writer said she would. Subsequently she went to that minister's church and preached it for her congregation, which is comprised largely of children.

New Life International Christian Center, I Met a Dude Who Read Me!

The preacher changed the title of the sermon for this sermon and for future use.

This people received the sermon very well. It was interesting that the young people laughed as she preached the sermon. At first when she heard them laughing at her preaching in Hip Hop or RAP Language, she was shocked. She thought it might not have been going well. Then as she looked around the room, she could see the smiles on their faces. They were not laughing at her for negative reasons; they were laughing with her and enjoying the sermon. It was obvious that they had never heard anyone preach using the slang they use on a daily basis.

After the sermon was completed, a lady approached her and said, "I really wanted to jump to my feet during the sermon." The preacher asked, "Why didn't you?" "You should have!" She said, "That was amazing." The preacher told her she should have because in the African American tradition there can be a call and response type of sermon. In addition, African American congregations may express their understanding or enjoyment of a sermon by saying, "AMEN", clapping, or jumping to their feet. One disadvantage to full expression for all was the space was quite small for the number of people present. The liturgical dancer had to be creative in her movements because of the space constraints.

Since this was a Haitian American congregation, the preacher was surprised that the service was in English. The youth speak English and Haitian Creole very well. The woman who complimented the sermon spoke to the thesis writer in excellent English, and she was not aware that she was Haitian American. When they terminated their conversation, she turned to a gentleman and spoke very fluent and fast French or Haitian

Creole. The only time any one used Creole was when they were singing some songs. A woman said, “Let’s sing that one in Creole”. All had fun that day from the youngest to the eldest. The preacher preached the sermon and positively influenced lives.

This reminded the thesis writer of one of the home churches that in the Bible. It might be like one that the book of Acts mentions. “And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. … And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,” (Acts 2:42, 46). There are additional references to house churches in the book of Acts such as the meetings in homes referred to in passages such as Acts 2:2; 5:42; 8:3; 10:24-48; 12:12; 16:15, 31-34, 40; 17:5; 18:7-8; 20:20; 28:30. Then there are other references to house churches in the New Testament. Here are some others: “Likewise greet the church that is in their house.” Romans 16:5. “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.” I Corinthians 16:19. “Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nympha and the church that is in his house.” Colossians 4:15. “To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.” Philemon 1-2.

After the worship service was over, the members served dinner. There was no communion because the sacrament of communion is on the first Sunday of the month.

One of the men in the congregation approached the preacher after the service and said you really need to put this on USTREAM⁶. The thesis writer said the liturgical dancer and she have talked about ministering through videotaping it. He said I mean perform it like a play. As he was leaving, she told him that the liturgical dancer and she are going to (not take it on the road but take it to the streets). When she asked the survey questions this is the outcome of the assessment she received.

1. Are you familiar with the scripture John 4:4-29, 39-42?

Four people responded in the affirmative that they were familiar with the scripture. Thirty-six could not answer this question with a yes prior to hearing the sermon. After hearing the sermon, thirty responded yes. Five said I now have an understanding of the scripture. Three responded that they now feel they know this scripture. Two still did not reply in the affirmative.

2. Who are the characters in the scripture?

No one could answer this question prior to hearing the sermon. However, after hearing the sermon, twenty-five people said Jesus and the woman at the well. Six also included the disciples with Jesus and the woman at the well. Two said Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Two said Jesus. Five said Jesus, the woman, bystanders or the people and the disciples.

3. Have you ever heard a first person narrative?

The thesis writer adapted this question and made it more general instead of asking about the particular scripture. One pre-teen answered yes and then explained that it is told

⁶ He referenced this web site, which he had shown the author on December 31, 2010, <http://www.ustream.tv/>. He has volunteered to videotape Denise Seymour and me minister and place it on USTREAM.

speaking as 'I'. No one else replied before the sermon. However, after the sermon, those who replied said that it is telling a story as me or I. A few said that one of the characters in the story is telling it.

4. What is happening in the story?

No one answered this question prior to the sermon. Thirty-five indicated in some manner or another that the woman met Jesus at the well as she was getting water. She did not think he would speak to her but he did. Her life changed for the better and she was able to go and tell others what he can do for them. Five said Jesus and the Samaritan woman spoke after her initial apprehension, she gave him a drink of water and he told her about her sinful past. He told her he had living water for her and she went out and told others about him.

5. What might Jesus be saying to us?

Yet again, there was no reply to this question prior to the sermon. After the sermon, twenty-five people said Jesus accepted the woman at the well just as she was but helped her to see that with him and the living water her life will change for the better. Fifteen said Jesus, wants the woman and us to know that he can offer us something better after he meets us as we are.

The thesis writer wanted to send them home with a thirst to know more about the Samaritan woman's conversation with Jesus and the Bible in general. The thesis writer believes she accomplished this mission because of the comments and answers to the questions.

Personal Assessment

Out of the four sermons the thesis writer preached, she cannot say that she really had a favorite one. She does know that although it was difficult to find the venue to preach the Rap or Hip-Hop Sermon, it was gratifying for her and novel for the audience. It was interesting that the Mary and Martha sermon at Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center had one of the largest adult audiences. Usually the congregations in services at the nursing care centers are smaller than other venues. This was different. The only service that was comparable in size was the one at the Haitian American Bible study. Forty people attended. The youth and young adults at this service were extremely open to this type of sermon and received it enthusiastically.

Conclusions

Crafting the sermons proved to be most enjoyable and relevant. The preacher found that she really flourishes when writing and preaching first person narrative sermons. She has always had an interest in drama and these sermons really afforded her the opportunity to participate in a medium in an innovative manner. As she preached the sermons, analyzed the outcomes and reflected upon the entire experience, the preacher reminded herself of the words attributed to Mark Twain, one of the greatest writers, who ever lived. “If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you always got.” The thesis writer realizes that in order to assist women to make a change in their lives ministers have to be willing to change their homilies.

One of the plans for writing this thesis was to be transformative. The author believes despite the constraints of time, availability of preaching venues and an inability to preach to an entirely female audience, the sermons did transform lives. A large piece

of transformation is planting the seeds or introducing a population to new ideas and new ways to understand the Bible.

The contention is when men are transformed women will be transformed as well and the converse is true. Although the thesis writer wrote these sermons for and with females in mind, she is pleased that they are relevant to males as well. The Bible tells us to love one another. We must love everybody, go out, and spread the good news. In our society with so much chaos and so many displays of hate instead of love, sermons that transform are critical.

Being transformative is to transform or to change in some manner. In theological studies and arenas, some say it more concisely could be a majestic change.

To sit through a quality sermon is something like ascending the Mount of Transfiguration. Prior to that moment, Jesus resembled any other man. He looked and dressed and groomed himself like a common man. But on the Mount of Transfiguration, his appearance changed to display his full divine nature. The glory of God radiated forth, his face blazing like the sun and his clothes becoming heavenly white. The curtain was pulled back, revealing reality. During a sermon, we are in a sense transfigured. Our true dignity from God shines forth. Nothing else in life treats a man or woman in a way that assumes greater worth or higher powers.⁷

The preparing, preaching of the sermons and writing of this thesis will facilitate the author's ministry by allowing global access. She will be able to access other mediums and establish a web presence to be a component of a transformational church. Preaching first person narrative sermons can be an effective vehicle for teaching people about the Bible, the characters, the various scriptures and the themes of the books of the Bible that are especially relevant to women.

⁷ Craig Brian Larson, "A Weekly Dose of Compressed Dignity: How a sermon gives worth to the soul", *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed., Haddon W. Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 30.

In the words of a critic of Secretary of the State, Hilary Rodham Clinton emphasizing that what she purports about women in the 21st Century also applies to women in the 21st century church.

She focused on investments in women and girls, saying that women will be central to her development efforts. Not surprisingly, I think that's just right. You just get more bang for the buck when you focus on girls, as Clinton noted. And, more broadly, she talked about investments rather than just aid, which is also the right way to think about some initiatives.⁸

"We can succeed, and when we do, our children and grandchildren will tell the story that American know-how, American dollars, American caring, and American values helped meet the challenges of the 21st century. Thank you all very much."⁹

After preaching these sermons, researching the literature and completing the exegesis of the scriptures, the thesis writer knows that for her a transformation occurred. This thesis writer believes that she has undertaken to transform others and do what Jesus has called her to do. She is better able to sit at his feet, hang on his every word, preach good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoner from darkness, to comfort those who mourn, to go into our leaders' presence to beg for mercy, and plead with them for our people. Many from this city might believe in him because of this woman's testimony, 'He told her everything she had ever done.' She and prayerfully you, the reader, as well as the attendees at the sermons, believe that God shall renew your life and sustain you in your old age.

⁸ Hillary Rodham Clinton, Jan 6, 2010, from a speech Secretary Clinton: Development in the 21st Century *updated*.

⁹ Nicholas D. Kristoff, Hillary Clinton on Development Issues Remarks about Hillary Rodham Clinton's speech of Jan 6, 2010. <http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/01/06/hillary-clinton-on-development-issues/> (Accessed August 12, 2010).

APPENDIX A

SERMONS FOR LUKE 10:38-42

WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

Preached at Jesus Mission Church, Dorchester, MA on June 25, 2010

Mary:

Martha, Martha, Jesus is coming! (Mary is looking out the door and runs to meet Jesus) Jesus, I have been waiting anxiously for you to get here.

(Mary follows Jesus into the house and when he sits down, she sits at his feet. She is hanging on his every word.)

(Martha is in the kitchen making preparations for dinner.)

What? I hear Martha calling Jesus by name. She asks, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!

I don't want to get up and help Martha right now. I want to spend time with Jesus. Please don't make me leave you right now, Jesus.

Uh-oh. I hear Jesus calling Martha by name. He says Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her. Awesome, I can continue to sit at Jesus' feet, listen to his every word and spend time with him.

AMEN

BUSY MAY NOT ALWAYS BE BETTER

Preached at Saint Josephs Nursing Care Center, Dorchester, MA on November 14, 2010

Mary:

Martha, Martha, Jesus is coming! (Mary is looking out the door and runs to meet Jesus) Jesus, I have been waiting anxiously for you to get here.

(Mary follows Jesus into the house and when he sits down, she sits at his feet. She is hanging on his every word.) (Martha is in the kitchen making preparations for dinner.)

What? I hear Martha calling Jesus by name. She asks, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!

I don't want to get up and help Martha right now. I want to spend time with Jesus. Please don't make me leave you right now, Jesus.

Uh-oh, I hear Jesus calling Martha by name. He says Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her. Awesome, I can continue to sit at Jesus' feet, listen to his every word and spend time with him.

Martha:

Well Jesus is here again and I am really happy to have him as a guest in my home. There is Mary sitting at his feet again and hanging on his every word. I know Jesus is hungry. He has traveled so far. He must want something to eat now. But Mary is monopolizing all of His time. She just will not let him relax and enjoy Himself. I am just so used to being a caregiver and taking care of people. I had to raise Mary and Lazarus since mother and father died. I really don't have time to sit and relax at Jesus' feet like Mary does. Didn't she learn anything when the disciples told her not to pour all of that expensive oil on Jesus?

Oh, I Think I smell the bread in the oven. It smells good right now but I don't want it to burn. The fish needs to be watched carefully so it won't get overcooked. It's just about perfect. The sour milk is just about, like Jesus likes it. The fruit must be washed and prepared. The mat needs to be set. The milk, honey, figs, nuts, vegetables, dates and olives must be put on that eating mat.

"Then again that Mary is just sitting and relaxing. Well something must be done. Jesus will have to intervene." "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me." "Wait a minute." "I hear Jesus calling my name."

Jesus:

"Martha, Martha you are worried and distracted by many things. But Mary has chosen that which is better and it won't be taken from her."

Martha:

"I really love Jesus but sometimes I don't understand him. He is a most special guest in my home and I want to make sure he has whatever he needs. I do really love him but if I don't do the work it will never get done. Mary won't do it or even help me do it. What's a girl to do? Nobody understands me."

"Maybe after we eat, I will spend some personal time with Jesus. I'll have a little talk with Jesus. I'll lay all my burdens down. I'll choose what is better like Mary does. However, I do have to clean the kitchen. It's tough sometimes being the big sister. A woman's work is never done."

AMEN

APPENDIX B

THE BOOK OF ESTHER 1, 2 AND 4 CHILDREN'S SERMON

TRADE YOUR CROSS FOR A CROWN

Preached at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church, Dorchester, MA
November 23, 2010

One day I will trade in my cross for a crown.

Sometimes if a friend or you don't have a parent or an adult available you can still achieve your goals and dreams. In the case of me, little Esther, both of my parents died but I was still being taken care of and supported. What do they call someone whose parents have died and they are under 18 or not of legal age? Yes. You are right. They call them orphans. Does anyone in here know someone who has been orphaned? How many of you have read the story called the *Homecoming* or *Dicey's Song*? Have you heard about Dicey and her siblings? We know that Dicey has siblings but from the Biblical story, we don't know if I had any.

We do know that I was taken in and cared for by my uncle because it says so in the book of Esther chapter 2 verse 7. God watches over us and even if it may not seem like we are going to get all we want, we will get all we need. I may not have felt good when my parents died but I did have family to take care of me. Sometimes I felt low and maybe unwanted. God sent my uncle to see after me. Vashti made a choice not to follow the king's edict, and she was removed from the throne and I was brought in to take her place.

When you are feeling low and not sure what to do, you can have a little talk with Jesus, like I did. He will make it all right for you and your family. You know Christmas is coming up and we will all want lots of toys, clothes, jewelry, maybe even MP 3 players and other things that we may not be able to get. No matter if we can't get everything we want we can still be thankful. As the story of Esther shows us, even if we don't have parents, friends or our lives are not what we want them to be, we can still be happy and bless others. Jesus calls for us to love one another. Jesus loves us unconditionally and we can love our parents, siblings, friends and those who provide for us unconditionally too. It is a tall order or hard to do but we can. You can do it. Yes, you can.

That uncle of mine was sometimes hard on me. He made me study and do the right thing. But you know it paid off. When I thought my life was hard, I could have a little talk with God. You can too. If you are not sure that you will get what you want for your birthday or Christmas, you can have a little talk with Jesus. Just a little talk with Jesus makes it right.

With love, joy, peace, longsuffering or patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance or self-control we can live the kind of life Jesus wants us to live.

When I was a little girl, I loved clothes especially dresses and modeling. I didn't know when I was five years old that it was modeling that was inspiring to me but I do know that my godmother used to take me to her house and take me to church with her. At least once a year she would have a fashion show at her church and I would be in it when I was little.

Vashti probably felt modeling was different from being brought in front of drunken men, paraded around and dancing before them. She may have been comfortable modeling but she wasn't comfortable doing it in front of the king's men. I am glad that I didn't have to go through exactly what Vashti went through but I think I know how Vashti might have felt. I was young then but it was not the best thing for the king to do. If she could have taken a stand and remained queen, she would have but when I was a child, we didn't have any say in what people did to us especially at our ages. However you live in a time when you can be like me, Esther, as I matured, and stand up for your Godly rights and say, as I did, if I perish I perish. You can tell your parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers and principals if someone is trying to do something that makes you feel bad or you don't think is right. Later I did have a chance to stand up for the rights of the Jewish people and help my uncle as he helped me.

When I think of my story, I think of how one queen was dethroned and I took her place. I think of Vashti the first queen and how she took a stand. When we take a stand, things might look tough and things might get hot. But if you feel you are making the right choice after you have talked with God, then stand your ground and stand firm in the Lord.

Esther, Dicey, Cinderella and Vashti all had crosses to bear. Your cross might be that you have no parents, you don't have everything you want or everything you see others with, or you can't have all the toys or games you want. But one day if you live a good life and learn how to follow god's commandments and biblical teachings you will trade in your old rugged cross for a crown.

AMEN

APPENDIX C

THE BOOK OF RUTH CHAPTERS 1-4 SERMON

SWEET, THEN BITTER, NOW EVEN SWEETER

Preached at Boston Home Nursing Care Center, Dorchester, MA on November 28, 2010

Songs:

“What a Mighty God We Serve”

“There’s Something Mighty Sweet About the Lord”

“Jehovah Jireh, My Provider”

Prayer:

Naomi:

This is my grandbaby, my grandson. (Holding Baby Obed doll) I love him so much. He is the apple of my eye. I didn’t always think that I would have him. But let me begin at the beginning.

See it was a long time ago. I lived in Moab because my husband Elimelech brought me there during the famine in Bethlehem, Judah. Besides my husband, I had two sons, one named Mahlon and one called Kilion. One was sickly and the other was failing. They were just born ailing. But now I see that God certainly knows best. Well they both had beautiful wives. They married Moabite women. They may not have been from our home but they were good women. Right now I do know that one of them still is a good woman.

See my sons and my husband died and I was distraught. My given name was Naomi but after what I had been through I told everyone they should just call me Mara. I used to be sweet and my life was sweet too but then it became bitter. When I lost my husband and both sons and had no one to provide for me, my life became bitter. The name Mara means bitter and Naomi means sweet or pleasant.

Well I woke up one day after my husband and sons were dead and gone. I decided that I was going home. The famine was over and I had no reason to stay in a strange and foreign land any longer. I told my two daughters-in-law that I was going back to Judah and they said they were coming with me. Those girls are so special to me. As we began our journey down the road, I told them I have no more sons to give you for marriage. Go back to your home and make a life for yourself. Orpah turned back. But Ruth said where you go, I go, where you die, I die; your people shall be my people. May the lord deal with me ever so severely if I leave you. That girl always was special to me and my favorite.

So that begins our journey. We traveled long and winding roads but we made it. When we arrived home, everyone came to greet us and called me Naomi. That’s when I told them I changed my name and my new name is Mara.

We made it. Two women alone, an older woman with a younger daughter-in-law weren't supposed to make it. But we did. Not only did we make it, but we found Boaz, a kinsman redeemer for Ruth and me. He let her work in his fields and did the right thing by finding out if he were allowed by law and tradition to marry her. He was and he did. He took care of her and me too. Now I am no longer bitter Mara, I am sweet Naomi again here with the apple of my eye. My Obed is the one to replace the sons I lost. (Picks up the doll again) This precious baby will grow up to be the grandfather to King David, the man after God's own heart. All the land and history will say that I was the one to rock him in my arms.

So don't turn back when things seem bad. When your life is not pleasant, continue to follow God and His will for you. He is a way maker. He will make a way out of no way. Read my story when you get discouraged or down. We do serve a mighty God. When you grow old in years, maybe you too will have an Obed. This Obed will be there for me and care for me in my older years just like his mother and father cared for me when I was sad and feeling like God had forsaken me. Nobody told me the road would be easy. I have seen and felt some pain but through it all, God's been good to me. He didn't promise there would be no misfortune or that we wouldn't lose those that we love but He did promise that he would be there for us. He promised never to leave us nor forsake us. He is my way maker. He is my Lily of the valley. He is my supporter. He is my strength in a time of need. He was my provider when I lost my sons and my husband. He did it for me and He'll do it for you. Now you've heard about my Obed and prayerfully my sweet Lord, Little Baby Jesus.

AMEN

APPENDIX D

THE BOOK OF JOHN 4:4-30 & 39-42 SERMON

FROM HOOCHIE TO HEROINE AND I MET A DUDE WHO READ ME LIKE I'VE NEVER BEEN READ

Preached at Greater Light Temple of Christ Church, Dorchester, MA
December 12, 2010

And

Preached at New Life International Christian Center on January 30, 2011

I want to tell you about how my life was and what I used to do until I met a man who told me everything I've ever done.

This dude came up to me asking me to get him a drink

We be like the Hatfield's and the McCoy's

Hey dude you better step off

You on the wrong turf

I am a woman but I don't roll like that

He be talking about some living water.

He say water that makes you no longer want or need to drink

Nobody ever takes time for me

They don't want to give me my props

I got a honey who I could call to handle this dude

Don't he know who I am?

Don't he know the homies I hang with?

Hey he gonna ask me about my boo

I ain't married to nobody

I ain't even hooked up like that

How he be getting all up in my stuff

And reading me like that

Who is this dude?

What he want from me?

I gotta man

But could it be possible that it ain't even like that?

Maybe he ain't just trying to get with me

Maybe he got a message for me

Word up

He reading me and he ain't even judging me

He gonna give me some water

He say some living water

So I won't have to come to this place when it is hot and lonely
I think I like his game
He don't be perpetrating

I gotta go and tell my peeps what this dude told me
He say I gotta a new life now
I don't have to live for the Benji's any more
I don't have to be with one man after another.
I just been schooled about water that never makes one thirst again
I can jump out of my old bag and let the world know that
This Papa's got a brand new bag.

I been with those five or more brothers
When we moved on we moved on
I don't think nothin of it
Life just be like that sometime

I don't have to be a Hoochie any more
I don't have to wear clothes that let the dogs see what I got
Now I can let them guess who I am and treat me like I need to be treated
I can find a brother who won't be hitting or using me
He won't call me 'B' or 'H'
I won't be just his bed Shorty.

I found a dude who told me all about myself and He did it because I am a queen and he is the King.

He really is the King!
He ain't just my king he will be your king too.
Let me tell you about the man who has life and has it more abundantly. He ain't just no ordinary brother either.
He won't just be gaming on us
He is King of Kings. He ain't just a King. He is a Rock. He is Sweet Honey in the Rock!
He is my All and All. He is Lord of Lords. He is my Jehovah Jireh. He is my Everything
Come on sisters, brothers too. Come and get with my King. You can hook up with this Dude and have it like that.

He takes you just as you are. You meet Him when you frontin, dirty and in the streets.
He'll help you to recognize that you are somebody. You have a heart. You have a brain, you have a body, and most of all you have a soul. Like Dorothy of the Wizard of Oz, you'll find your home. Then you can give it all to Him and go out and spread the good news.

I found the Savior and now I can have a new walk and a new talk.
I can be myself and respect myself
There is nothing wrong with how I talk when I am talking with my friends.

But I do need to learn good English and grammar so now I can spread the word throughout the land.

I can tell my friends in our language but as I do I can also tell those I meet in interviews, those I have to convince to let me into their school or college.

There is a time and a place for everything.

But one thing Jesus wants me to get from this scripture is no matter how I spread the Word, I must spread it.

So Rap it, Hip Hop it, sing it, or put it in poetry. Write a play.

Just spread the good news so because of you many people will come to believe.

AMEN

APPENDIX E

INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE MARY AND MARTHA SERMON

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

06/25/10

AGENDA AND SURVEY QUESTIONS

LUKE 10: 38-42

AT THE HOME OF MARY AND MARTHA

Please take a few minutes to answer these questions on the paper supplied.

- 1) Are you familiar with this Bible Story?
- 2) Do you know what scripture it comes from? If so, which one?
- 3) What did Jesus say to Martha and Mary?
- 4) What do you think Jesus might be saying to you through this scripture?
- 5) Do you think one or some of the characters in this story needed to hear something? If so, who?
- 6) What did Mary learn?
- 7) What did Martha Learn?
- 8) In what town do Mary and Martha live?
- 9) Who was the special dinner guest?
- 10) Who chose the better thing Mary or Martha?
- 11) Have you ever heard a sermon preached like this?
- 12) Do you like this type of preaching?
- 13) Did you learn anything new?
- 14) After hearing the sermon what do you know now?
- 15) What topics would you like to see in the future?

Agenda

Icebreaker: Pick a Penny

Devotions

Opening Prayer

Pre-Questionnaire

Meditation or Sermon

Post-Questionnaire

Discussion

APPENDIX F

FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE ADDITIONAL SERMONS

The thesis writer used the same questionnaire for each scripture and sermon after the initial sermon with modifications for the particular scripture.

Sermon Questionnaire

Raise your hand if so or answer the questions.

1. Are you familiar with the scripture Luke 10:38-42?
2. Who are the characters in the scripture?
3. Have you ever heard a First Person Narrative sermon?
4. What is happening in the story?
5. What might Jesus be saying to us?

Now that you have heard the sermon, answer the same questions again.

Raise your hand if so or answer the questions.

1. Are you familiar with the scripture Luke 10:38-42?
2. Who are the characters in the scripture?
3. Have you ever heard a First Person Narrative Sermon?
4. What is happening in the story?
5. What might Jesus be saying to us?

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VITA

Rev. Denise Myers has a propensity for using dramatic presentations in ministry. She was senior pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Lowell, MA for 5 1/2 years before requesting a leave of absence primarily to complete her doctoral studies. She is currently facilitating a Bible study in preparation for a church plant by the end of this year. She is a life-long learner, long time educator and preaching is her passion.

Denise graduated from Northeastern University in Boston, MA in 1976 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. She received a Master of Education degree in Counseling and Management from Cambridge College in 1990. She received a Master of Education degree in Computer Technology from Emmanuel College in 1997. She received a Master of Divinity degree from Harvard University in 2001. She began her residency at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Pastoral Skills for the 21st Century in 2002. She anticipates receiving her Doctor of Ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in May 2012.

Denise has written two children's books, which she anticipates she will publish in the near future. Nearly every summer she coordinates and facilitates a Christian retreat for adult women and this year hopes to include teenagers and young girls.

Denise was born in Newark, NJ on December 13, 1952. She is happily married to Humphrey Myers. She is the mother of two daughters, Takia Cherise Morel and Chanda Vernise Christopher. She is the grandmother of nine-year-old Taimir Jordan Morel. Having her 95-year-old father, David White, living with her here in Boston is a blessing.